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FREE THOUGHTS
UPON
METHODISTS,
ACTORS,
AND THE
INFLUENCE OF THE STAGE;

WITH AN
Introductory Letter to Mrs. —, —,
Of ——— Castle,
GLAMORGANSHIRE,
Upon the Origin of the DRAMA, &c. &c. &c.

BY ROBERT MANSEL,
Of the Theatres Royal York and Hull.

LIKEWISE,
A DISCOURSE
ON THE
Lawfulness and Unlawfulness of Plays;
WRITTEN BY THE
LEARNED FATHER CAFFARO,
DIVINITY PROFESSOR AT PARIS.

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

JOHN vii. 24.

"Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination, in the sight of God."

LUKE xvi. 15.

HULL:

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TO THE PUBLIC.

The following subscription originated with some friends of Mr. Mansel, who wished to secure him from the possibility of sustaining a pecuniary loss. At the same time, in compliment to his feelings, they declined attempting by personal application or solicitation to swell the list beyond the end designed. This friendly and delicate mode of promoting his interest, without compromising his honour, claims his warmest gratitude, and will, at once, explain the cause of the work's appearing with such aid, and account for the paucity of the numbers.

To those who have favoured him with their assistance, and voluntary support, to accomplish the object proposed, he tenders his sincere thanks. He is convinced by their coming forward unsolicited, that they will appreciate the value of grateful acknowledgments from a man too proud to beg, and too just to receive a favour with silence and indifference. He is aware that many of his brother performers (particularly those with whom he has had the pleasure of associating) will be surprised, if not hurt, at the apparent neglect which has been evinced towards them, in not being apprised of his intention to publish by subscription.

In his own defence, he can only state, that it was his original purpose to have forwarded a prospectus to every

theatrical community in the united kingdom, and he had determined upon addressing them by letter, through the medium either of the managers or their deputies; and thus have put it in the power of the individuals to give, or to withhold the sanction of their names. In conformity with this plan, five advertising letters were despatched. His professional pursuits, and other avocations, prevented his accomplishing the whole scheme at one time. A few weeks escaped, and he began to suspect he had been guilty of an impertinence. Six months have now elapsed, and three of his letters out of the five remain unanswered, unnoticed!

This painful experience prevented him from running the chance of being again wounded by silent hints of rebuke. To the other two gentlemen, (Mr. Robertson, the manager of the Sheffield company, and Mr. Fitzgerald, the acting manager at Norwich) Mr. M. considers himself highly indebted, not only for the promptitude of their replies, but for the friendly interest they expressed for his success through life. To Mr. Matthews, of Covent-Garden, he feels much obliged for the facility with which he furnished Mr. M. with the corrections and additions to the instances of longevity given in page 153.

To the subscribers in general, he once more offers his acknowledgments; should the ensuing sheets be found to possess any claim to public approbation, he is convinced they will congratulate themselves for the assistance they have furnished. Should the work be found unworthy of support, he will congratulate himself that the contributions were not extended.

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THE PATRONS, SUPPORTERS,
FRIENDS, AND ADMIRERS
OF THE
D R A M A,
THIS ATTEMPT TO RESCUE IT
FROM ASPERSION,
AND
ESTABLISH ITS UTILITY,
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.
TO OBTAIN THEIR APPROBATION
IS THE ANXIOUS EARNEST WISH
AND AMBITION OF THEIR

MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

Robert Mansel.

HULL, March 1, 1814.

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AN

INTRODUCTORY EPISTLE

Addressed to Mrs. ———,

Of ——— Castle,

GLAMORGANSHIRE;

Containing a succinct account of the Origin of the Stage, with a view of it at the period, when it became an object of reprehension to the Fathers of the Church. Also, a brief examination of the different opinions delivered on the subject of the Drama, by ancient Philosophers and the earlier Ecclesiastics.

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To Mrs. ———,

————— *Castle,*

GLAMORGANSHIRE.



MADAM,

WHEN reflection casts back a retrospective glance, through the intervening medium of care, disappointments, misfortune, contumely and regret, to the tranquil period of my life, passed under the roof of your pious, reverend, and much esteemed

B

father, it arises to my recollection like a poetical dream, or fairy vision of the mind. The placid fleeting hours, dedicated to a reciprocal exchange of thought, during "that happy age, when nature wears no mask," serve to mark succeeding years of anxiety and pain with a most frightful chilling contrast! Still, neither lapse of time, effect of absence, pressure of the world, difference of situations,—nothing can banish the object from my memory, that once constituted the source, from whence those pure joys of innocence and youth alone could emanate!

To find you possessing rank, wealth, splendour, talents, and accomplishments, and still retaining your native innocence of mind, cheerfulness of temper, and suavity of manner, is a subject as much to the honour of human nature, as it is consolatory to your many friends.

I have more than ever to lament the poverty of my genius, in not possessing taste or powers to produce a composition, calculated to display the high sense I entertain of your worth and excellence, by an open avowal of your name, which would at once gratify the wish of my heart, and excite an interest in my favour that would adorn and support a much weaker cause than the one I have the honour to advocate. But, proudly advantageous as this disclosure would be, I have neither the selfishness, nor the indelicacy to implicate your name, in a controversy, with opponents not over precise in their selection of abusive epithets, nor over delicate in the mode of conveying them. It is not your rank, your genius, no nor your philanthropy, would protect you from the virulence of vulgarism,—ignorance,—prejudice,—and bigotry, who, one—and all,—would, with closed eyes, expanded ears, and open

mouths, overwhelm you with froth, folly, venom, and impertinence!

Your knowledge and admiration of the arts, they would term profane; your taste in poetry and painting, heathen; your skill in music, useless; your partiality to the drama, impious; and your modest christian demeanour, faint-hearted, luke-warm zeal. In vain, would all, who are blessed with your acquaintance, urge your charities, your exemplary conduct, as a wife and a mother, your assiduous regard to all the relative duties of your station—in short, that your numberless good qualities demand the esteem, love, and admiration of the wise, the good, and the virtuous. All these, with my opponents, pass as nothing! Dust in the balance!—FILTHY WORKS!!—Your total want of that lively FAITH, burning in the fervid imaginations of the Westleyan and Whitfieldian sects, amounts in this *evangelical* age, to such an enor-

mous offence, as to counterbalance every other virtue, moral or divine, that can adorn the human breast.—No, Madam, your religious education, has been too well grounded; your judgment too sound; and your heart too pure, to participate in the sensations of our modern mystic visionaries! You can prostrate yourself before your great Creator, with all the rational veneration of a virtuous human being. You can, with all the warmth of honest gratitude, offer up your feeble thanks for the many blessings He has bestowed upon you.—You can, with a noble expansion of feeling, implore the Divine favour and mercy upon ALL your fellow-creatures. But you would never presume to hurl the Almighty vengeance against a poor, imperfect, erring brother! No, Madam, you are too well versed in the genuine principles of christianity, to become *religiously blasphemous*! Nor, could you have the insanity to transport yourself, with the frantic idea

of *beholding* the various attributes of the triune God*. We will leave these anti-

* About three in the morning (says Mr. Wesley) the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the PRESENCE OF HIS MAJESTY, we broke out with one voice, *We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.*

Coke and Moore's life of Wesley, second edition, p. 178.

“At preaching this morning, I was so overcome with the love and PRESENCE, *and exceeding glory of my TRIUNE GOD*, that I sunk down unable to support it!” “At the love-feast, I was again overwhelmed with his *immediate* PRESENCE.” As I came from meeting, I was so overpowered with the PRESENCE of God, that had not a friend supported me, I could not have walked home. I was lost in depths of love, and admitted as it were, into the *immediate* presence of my Lord's glory!

Extracts given in Mr. Nightingale's Portraiture of Methodism, from the works of a Miss Roe of Macclesfield.—p. 99.

christian flights to the frequenters and supporters of band-meetings, watch-nights, and love-feasts.

But, highly as I appreciate your worth, and anxious as I have ever been to express my sense of it, there is still a selfish latent motive, which has strongly urged me to this covert address. —I am upon the point of enduring the toil and pain attendant upon an unprofitable, irksome journey. Now, though I purpose travelling with all possible celerity, yet, in the course of my tour, I shall have to encounter so many disagreeables, and have to wander through such a labyrinth of absurdities, that it will require every aid to support me in my progress. The most pleasing and essential assistance I can possibly devise, is by mentally enjoying your society during my pursuit: “By bearing your idea ever present in my thoughts, virtue shall keep an advocate within me;” and as your

cooler judgment used frequently to check the petulance of the Boy, your *ideal* presence shall restrain the impetuosity of THE MAN, This will inspire me with confidence to accomplish my task, conquer difficulties, and remove impediments of every description. Thus having fixed the plan to my own wish, let us proceed ; I will, however, first of all inform you, that in our rapid excursion, we shall enjoy a transient glance of those cities so celebrated by historians, philosophers, orators, poets, and painters ; cities of your earliest acquaintance, and objects of your more mature admiration——Athens and Rome.

We shall converse, for a short time, with several of your most intimate acquaintance ; but they will not, as usual, command that attention, respect, and delight which you have ever considered as their just tribute.

Forbidding, as this prospect is, I am sorry to say it is the most brilliant we shall enjoy in this intended pilgrimage,—When we quit clasical ground we shall have to associate with strange beings, some of whom will provoke your laughter, others your anger. Some will excite your disgust, others merit your contempt, and all will ultimately demand your pity.

Two centuries have nearly elapsed, since the notorious Mr. Prynne paid the forfeiture of his ears as a just reward for his histrionical researches and personal inference. For nearly two centuries have the opposers of a theatre profited by Mr. Prynne's indefatigable industry, without the credit of possessing his perseverance or the *honour* of participating in his punishment. He formed for their benefit a reservoir, supplied with the filth of ages, and most amply have they drawn from it, to bespatter and defile the stage

and all its adherents. *Cælum niare, fortiter et aliquid ad haribet.* For more than two centuries have my brother professors received insults and provocations, with a silence to be admired, and a forbearance under injuries to be envied. Two centuries endurance of calumny, give evident proofs of mental superiority on one side, and of imbecile persecution on the other. But "Sufferance is the badge of all our tribe." The anti-stagers, upon the authority of Mr. Prynne, have been constantly hurling against the object of their hatred philippics and anathemas furnished them by heathen philosophers and christian fathers.

Arming themselves with the antiquated opinions of those ancient literary heroes, they have conceived their attacks fatal, and their position impregnable.

But surely this enlightened age, and this advanced period of the world should

suggest to them the propriety of abandoning their worm-eaten entrenchments, of resigning their purloined weapons, disbanding their impotent auxiliaries, parting with their ill-sorted mercenaries, and standing fairly and openly before the tribunal of rational religion, moral reason, truth, and impartiality!—To this tribunal I cite them, and if they can prove to the satisfaction of this august assemblage, that my profession, is in opposition to the interests of religion and reason, the condemnation, by truth and impartiality, must follow. To their sentence I shall not only respectfully submit, but make the most ample atonement in my power, by a public confession of my errors, renunciation of my pursuits, and *reformation of MY LIFE*. To truth and impartiality I appeal; to them I call for a fair and open hearing; and on them I rely for protection from bigotted ignorance and fanatical zeal. I must here observe to you, Madam, that if our opponents had one par-

ticle of candour, or the most distant love for justice, they would themselves abandon the idea of disturbing, on the present occasion, the repose of these right reverend *auncient* gentry in question.

'They know in their hearts that they hate and despise the very works they look up to for support and protection*. The only deference ever shewn by the Methodists to the fathers of the church, the opinions of councils, or the Heathen philoso-

* It was said of some of the *fathers* in the christian chnrch, (who had been philosophers, the literati of that day) that they came into Canaan laden with Egyptian gold. They did so, and in a little time they persuaded the simple hearted to prize it more than the gold of ihe sanctuary.

They were indeed THE FIRST GRAND CORRUPTERS OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

Coke and Moore's life of Wesley, second edition, p. 531.

phers, is in the solitary scattered sentences, denouncing vengeance against the stage. To gratify this prejudice, to feed this darling antipathy, to plays and players, to demolish this fatal engine, every agent is welcomed ; they seize with avidity on every author ; however, absurd, foolish, ignorant, or impious, Heathen or christian, heretic or orthodox, all are embraced and cherished, if they will only bellow for the invectives against the stage, and labour for its destruction. When engaged in this *meritorious pursuit*, rochets, lawn sleeves, scarlet hats, triple mitres, and all the *sacerdotal paraphernalia* is deprived of its BABYLONISH terrors. The fastidious puritan receives them as valuable allies, and elevates them to the highest rank of learning, piety, and excellence! Now, Madam, fully to convince you that I am neither capricious nor arbitrary in rejecting the interference of the ancients, Heathen, or christian, we will proceed in our

intended excursion, and take a rapid survey of the history of the stage, from its first invention down to the present period, when the early fathers of the church avowed themselves its inveterate and determined opposers. We will then take a separate investigation of the different opinions delivered, and thus be enabled to determine and judge how far they can be brought to assimilate with the condemnations of the present stage, or how far they can apply to the now existing drama.

It is a generally received opinion with the learned, that the *Ludi* and *Spectacula* of the *Greeks* and *Romans*, formed a great part of the solemn and public worship of their Gods, and were instituted on purpose to commemorate some signal benefit or expiate some calamity of which those Gods were the supposed authors or instruments. These shows were usually preceded by a solemn procession of the Gods to whom

they were dedicated, and the priests and sacrificers in their formalities, with the victim in all its religious pomp; this was succeeded by vows made, and sacrifices performed upon the spot, whether it were theatre, circus, or any other public building*.

After all these were performed or finished, the show was ordered to begin, which was also a principal part of the religious worship, and concluded the solemnity of the day. In these shows, the amours of the Gods were related and sung, with the accompaniments of music and dancing.—The whole forming the most obscene, disgraceful spectacle possible to

C 2

* Nearly the whole of this short inquiry into the origin of the drama, &c. is taken from "The ancient and modern stages surveyed." An ingenious work published in reply to Mr. Collier, dated 1699.

be conceived, much less exhibited before any people advanced beyond the verge of barbarism.—The lowest stews alone could furnish prostitutes depraved enough to be assistant characters at these festive debaucheries. The full description of which would only sully my pages, offend decency, and repel the eye of modesty. I mention the *Ludi* and the *Spectaculi* first, because by the careless and the inattentive, they are very frequently blended with the legitimate drama. More than half of the invectives given to the ancient schoolman, and the fathers originated in their invincible hatred to these abominable shows*.—Not that I presume to claim an origin of a superior kind, for the foundation of dramatic representations. No—like the *Spectaculi* and the *Ludi*, it sprung from the *religious*

* Josephus, or his translator, designate *Aliturus* an actor, but he was a Pantomime in high favour with Nero.

worship of the HEATHENS. It was invented in honour to Bacchus, and consisted of songs in his praise, music and dancing, about a sacrificed goat, intermixt with rustic raillery, suitable to the genius and temper of the boors and villagers that were the performers. Tragedy and comedy were not then considered separate provinces in poetry, but either name indifferently signified the same thing; the first being taken from the sacrifice, which was a goat; the other from the performers, which were the peasants or villagers; or from the nature of the entertainment itself, which was composed of rural music, songs, and dances. It is presumed by some, that the partition of tragedy and comedy was first made, when the poets, quitting the dithyrambi or hymns to Bacchus, betook themselves to the representations of stories or fables of their own invention; the nature of the subjects then becoming different, according to the poet's choice, the names were

divided betwixt them. Or it may be, that the part which we now, in a restrained sense, call tragedy, being first refined and improved, and becoming the study and diversion of more polite men, and the other continuing longer in the possession of the villagers, retained the name of comedy, for distinction sake, even after its utmost improvements. I cannot intrude upon your time, nor infringe so far upon my own plan, as to pursue the drama through all its modifications, to its polished height, and vigorous form in Greece—nor follow its transplantation into Rome, the repulsive reception it encountered there, its finally surmounting all objections, and elevating itself to a rank inferior only to its Grecian parent. But, notwithstanding the dramatic art, improved so greatly upon its humble origin; notwithstanding the sacrifice of the goat, had been long discontinued—the satyri in praise of Bacchus abolished, and the plays appointed occasionally

in honour of any of the Gods, so that they were, as the auditors rightly observed, *Nihil ad Bacchum*, still the stage remained sacred to, and under the protection of its old patron, who had amongst the Romans his ALTAR on the RIGHT HAND of the STAGE, and the particular GOD, to whom the play was dedicated, on the left*. In this state, much degenerated by show and spectacle, the fathers found the Roman stage. And it was occasionally profaned by representations of the *Ludi Scenici*. “*Nec fas est nobis audire adulteria deorum hominumq, quæ suavi verborum modulantur mercede†.*”

* The figures of tragedy and comedy frequently occupy those situations in the modern theatre, but they have no WORSHIPERS, nor do we wish them.—We are as averse to ENTHUSIASM as we are hostile to SUPERSTITION.

† Another instance of their incorrectly blending the *Histriones* and the *Ludi*.

This being the case, a christian could not be present, or assist at these representations, without openly countenancing or conforming to the idolatrous worship of the Heathens; which the fathers, as became conscientious and pious pastors, were extremely solicitous to prevent. They were sensible of the difficulties they had to encounter, and the obstacles they had to surmount.

The christian religion was yet but newly planted, and therefore until it had taken sufficient root, was carefully to be covered and defended from the injuries of rude beasts, and the contagion of those rank superstitious weeds that grew about it, by which the root might be killed, or the soil infected, and the sap withdrawn. Paganism was a religion invented at first to oblige and captivate the people, and gained its credit and authority among them by indulging their sensuality, and

even gratifying their lusts ; it was augmented by degrees, by ambitious cunning men, who, to render themselves more popular, and gain an interest with the multitude, recommended to them under the notion of religion, what they found most acceptable to the humour and palate of the populace. By this means the various processions, games, and shows, were introduced, and became the most formal part of their solemnities ; men being easily persuaded to like what was so conformable to their inclinations, that in the exercise and discharge of their duties, their senses were entertained, and their appetites flattered. Against a superstition thus framed for luxury, and contrived for sensual enjoyment, christianity was to make its way, drive out those rites, destroy a title founded upon the prescription of many ages, supported by the authority of the civil government, and fortified in its possession by prejudice, inclination, and interest ; and all this to be

done with the assistance only of truth, and simplicity of doctrine and manners. The pomp and magnificence of their solemn worship was absolutely to be taken away, and their licentious practices to be restrained, reformed, and replaced, by severe principles and austerity. All this to be accomplished amongst a people, whom the submission and tribute of the world for ages, had made wealthy, proud, and wanton.

It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if those early champions of the gospel proportioned their zeal and vigilance to the magnitude of the occasion, and the strength of the opposition. The games and shows of the ancient heathens were the parts of their religion the most generally engaging, that attracted most and kept the multitude firmest to them. The fathers, who knew where the strength lay, have employed all their artillery against these shows; their batteries have played incessantly upon

them as the only forts that were capable of making resistance and stopping their progress — The drama, from its idolatrous origin, and its then existing appearance, of course participated with the shows in the condemnation of the fathers. It was unwarrantable because idolatrous; and, in their opinion, impossible for a christian, however well principled or disposed, to partake of the entertainment without sharing the pollution, or to abstract the diversion from the guilt. They thought it dangerous to trust their converts, however fortified, to the temptation of so seductive a religion, which was far from curbing the appetites or laying any restraints upon the desires of its proselytes. Indeed, many of its duties were but panders to their lusts, and most of its acts of devotion so many entertainments for their senses. The portion of those that embraced christianity was mortification and suffering, meeting perpetual discouragement, and (until the

time of Constantine) encountering frequent persecutions. Their reward was in reversion ; their expectation, indeed, was large, but the prospect was distant. Present ease and enjoyment are too apt to prevail against a remote hope. In our common affairs of the world futurity maintains itself but ill against the present ; and neither the greatness nor the certainty of the reversion will appear as a sufficient counter-balance to the immediate possession.

This was the case of christianity in its infancy. The heathen priesthood, contented with the countenance and encouragement of the state, submitted to the directions and appointment of it even in matters relating to their own mysteries : they assumed no dominion or jurisdiction over private consciences, either in point of principle or practice, but left those matters wholly to the civil government, which made laws for their regulation, and ap-

pointed magistrates for the inspection of men's manners, in which regard was had chiefly, if not only, to the public quiet and security—to the preservation and augmentation of the state.

The people therefore received easily, a religion, which, though false, gave them so little disturbance; their theology, like their worship, was suited, and adapted to the capacity of the multitude.—The one consisting of surprising fables, the other of delightful solemnities.

But the gospel had none of these advantages with the million; it was not contrived and modelled for popularity, it did not humour the inclinations, and indulge the appetites of the people. To the purity of its doctrine, a conformity of life and manners was required, the passions were to be curbed, and the desires moderated. Instead of pomp and learning, simplicity

and sobriety were to be their entertainments:—their amorous Gods, whose fabulous histories gave countenance to men's lusts, and encouragement to their debaucheries, were to be displaced, and the knowledge and worship of the TRUE ONE to be introduced, whose majesty was as grand and awful, as the others were represented trifling and culpable !

These were the conditions of conversion from Heathenism, and the change must appear to mere flesh and blood, rather disadvantageous. The Fathers, therefore, who knew how hard it was to keep the appetites in entire subjection, took care to fortify, as strongly as possible, those parts in which they expected the rebellion should first break out. The plays of all the Heathen solemnities were those that gave the strongest temptation to the new converts ; they had so little of the air of religion, that they thought if they did not countenance

the end and design of them, they might, without imputation, partake of the diversion, in which they met with frequent examples of innocence and virtue. This alarmed the Fathers, they justly apprehended that their converts, from liking the entertainments themselves, might proceed to approve the occasion of them.—To obviate these dangers, they summoned all their prudence, and all their art; they omitted no topic which rhetoric or satire could supply, to fright or persuade men from those diversions.

Nor was all their zeal and caution any more than was necessary—the danger was great, and so was the temptation; the fort was to be maintained, not only against an enemy without, but a strong faction within; the senses appetites, and passions were already gained to the enemies' party, nothing remained but religion and reason to make good the defence. Those generals therefore

that would hold out when the garrison was inclined to surrender, must not only display their courage and conduct, but exert their jurisdiction likewise to the utmost. This the ancient fathers did, whose examples have been followed by many in succeeding periods, without the same reason, authority, or success.

Thus, Madam, have we finished our projected tour, and as far as gratified curiosity can be satisfactory to an inquiring mind, I trust we have derived some satisfaction from the expedition.—We now come to the more delicate task of examining the qualifications of our accusers, and the justice of their accusations.—You will perceive we have formidable names to contend with; Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Solon, Seneca, Cicero, Livy, and a longtrain of &c's. frightful to enumerate. Be not alarmed—there's nothing in a name—"tush, tush, scare BOYS with BUGS."—Plato says,

“Plays raise the passions and pervert the use of them, and, by consequence, are dangerous to morality.”—There is the whole of Plato’s evidence?—Now, we can produce plays that *do not* pervert the passions, consequently, all plays upon that score are *not* dangerous. Xenophon condemns “the warm licentiousness of dramatic poets.”—Licentiousness is not now a necessary ingredient, it is justly dismissed in disgrace, and therefore Xenophon’s opinion is quite irrelevant to the subject. But I cannot dismiss this ancient worthy, without introducing to your notice a passage which I met with in a puritanical invective, written against the stage in the year 1699.—It is there set out with a formality of dulness, and an affectation of consequence that rendered it one of the most irresistibly comic passages I ever encountered.—It is a description of a dramatic entertainment, Xenophon witnessed—*where*, I am not sufficiently versed in ancient lore, to inform you,

but I will give it you as I found it. “ The Syracusian entered like Bacchus, with a pipe before him, playing a rioting tune. Then entered Ariadne, gorgeously apparelled like a bride, and sat down before the company ; she did not go to meet Bacchus *as a dancing*, nor rose from her seat, but made such signs as discovered he might have an easy conquest. When Bacchus beheld her, he expressed his passion, as much as possible, in his dance, and drawing near her, fell down on his knees, embraced and kissed her. She, though with some faint resemblance of coyness and modesty, embraced him again. At this the spectators gave shouts of applause!—The whole audience swore, that the boy and girl loved one another in reality ; for they did not act like those who had been taught only to personate those gestures. At last, when the company perceived that they were clasped in one anothers arms. Those that had *no wives*, swore they would MARRY,

and those that *were married*, took horse and went home to their WIVES IMMEDIATELY."

There, Madam, there is a delicate histrionical morceau!—But my author has done us great injustice, for he brings this forward as a very serious heavy charge, to prove the fatal influence of theatrical representations!—Now, really, had we *stage saints*, as well as kings, heroes, and bishops, the Syracusean boy and girl should have a theatrical canonization. At any rate, they are worthy of being perpetuated through the medium of statues, medals, poetry, and painting. Sincerely do I wish our modern Roscii had done but one ten thousandth part as much service to the state, and the morals of the people;—why, it is realizing the good old sentiment: "The single married, and the married happy."—It must have taken place in the golden age of the poets!—But pleasant and refreshing as this

delightful matrimonial prospect is, we cannot remain longer to dwell upon it.—We must proceed in our investigation.

Aristotle declaims against the impropriety of subjecting youth to the danger of a promiscuous company, until they are sufficiently fortified against the influence of corruption. He is particularly apprehensive of *drunkenness*, a term to which some of the disingenuous writers against the stage, have given a more extensive latitude, by interpreting it *debauchery*. To one of your classical information, it will appear strange, that Aristotle should be arranged on this side of the question; a writer, who has taken such infinite pains to establish rules for the more easy and regular composition of drama's, and has pronounced a finished tragedy to be the most exalted effort of human genius!—We must leave it to our judges, whether they will receive as honest evidence, an insulated passage

in contradiction to a work, that must have employed many years of his life. To imagine a man would lay down rules for the formation of a thing, of which he forbade the use, would be as ridiculous, as the idea of meeting a player without vanity, or a methodist without rancour. Solon expressed his dislike to the representations of Thespis, by striking his staff upon the ground, and uttering some angry words. The philosophers choler was excited by the ribaldry of an art, in its earliest and most imperfect state.

Seneca expressed his displeasure towards the Romans for neglecting their schools, and attending too closely to their theatres.— Yet, I need not tell you, that this same Seneca is supposed by Lipsius, Joseph Scaliger, and other celebrated critics, to have been the author of three tragedies, viz. *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, and *Troas*.

Cicero disapproves of the licentiousness too common in the latin dramatic poets.—But Tully, the orator, was the admirer, friend, and panegyrist of Roscius the actor.—Let us hear this eloquent pleader's opinion upon a sister art ;—he sententiously says “ The good and evil in a state depend greatly on the music, that is most encouraged in it. If it be too *light* and *wanton*, the people are insensibly rendered foolish and disorderly. If, on the contrary, it be *grave* and *masculine*, they become modest by its influence.”—Now, really, this may be all very sensible, and the admirers of antiquity discover much wisdom and latent excellence in this declaration.—This profound kind of trifling might have suited the genius of a Roman politician, and have corresponded with the dignity of the Tusculan orator.—But if Lord Henry Petty, with all his passion for the art, and his musical celebrity into the bargain, were seriously to advance such an absurd position, his friends

would be calculating on the melancholy idea of removing him from the chapel of St. Stephen's to the hospital of St. Luke's. —Livy condemns, with just indignation and severity, the encouragement given to the *Ludi Scenici*.—But these are representations as widely different from the legitimate drama, as a harlequinade can be to one of the divine compositions of Shakespeare.

I will not fatigue you or myself with wading through any more of these tedious and perverted authorities.—Even allowing the quotations cited against us in their full extent, still there are left some of the greatest men in antiquity, who admired the art, and exerted their utmost power to cherish and protect it.—Julius and Augustus were known to dedicate some of their leisure hours, when retired from the fatigues of state, to the composition of tragedy. Marcus Brutus, a character considered to be unimpeachable in ROMAN

virtue; was a warm patron and supporter of the drama.—Terence, in an indirect manner, confesses having received assistance from Scipio, Africanus, and Lelius. In short, Madam, the names of these great writers change sides so very often, just to suit the views of the opposers or supporters of a stage, that it really puzzles a 'plain simple man to judge or determine what party they possibly can appertain to—and by this perplexity add stronger ridicule to the idea of calling upon either Greeks or Romans to decide a question purely British ! Sincerely do I wish both parties would coincide in the propriety of their dismissal, nor longer suffer them to entangle or confuse a contest which they can neither elucidate nor terminate.

Having dispatched the ancients, I must now raise an enormous tax upon your patience, by entreating your attention to the opinions of men who existed in an age

most emphatically and justly designated **DARK**: when the sun of knowledge had not strength to vivify inquiry, or to animate exertion, when all the nobler emanations of the mind, inert, feeble, and emasculated, were easily led captives, by ignorance, bigotry, and superstition.—What will add to our mortification is, the necessity we shall be under of being more minute and particular in our examination of the opinions broached by ascetics and retired visionaries, than we were in the investigation of the more vigorous minded heathens.—It is our duty, Madam, and we must perform it.—The fathers have **UNEQUIVOCALLY** and **AVOWEDLY** proclaimed their opinions, violently and diametrically in opposition to the use of a stage.—Most of its succeeding adversaries have followed their mode of condemnation. All its present opponents, who embellish themselves with the name of christian, look up to the early and learned churchmen as

precedents for their conduct.—It behoves us, therefore, to search more strictly into this enormous, formidable display of ecclesiastical vengeance.—The survey we have taken of the ancient stage, will, in some measure, account for the rooted antipathy expressed by the fathers.—Much praise is due to them for their exertions in repelling such abominations as were then exhibited. That degraded, degenerate age is passed, and with it, all the merit of their opposition.—But still, I am inclined to call in question the means they adopted to check the profligacy of the thing they condemned.—Deceit is unpardonable—and, they have avowed charges, honest truth must condemn, and at which reason must revolt.—I will prove to you, that the zeal of these good fathers, so far outrun discretion, as utterly to vitiate their decisions, and incapacitate them for judges; St. Augustin, St. Chrysostom, St. Cyprian, and Tertullian are the great authorities from whence our modern devotees draw their invectives.

St. Augustin says, “That the stage was introduced into Rome for the recreation of the sensualists, and admitted by the dissolute morals of the time”—this may be true—but, unfortunately for the credit of himself and his admirers, he adds—“THE HEATHEN IDOLS DESIRED THAT IT MIGHT BE DEDICATED TO THEM!!”—I will not insult your understanding by expatiating on this absurdity.

St. Chrysostom railed most virulently against the stage, yet read and studied all the dramatic poets; and from that *impure source*, he borrowed a style of eloquence which made him the most persuasive and admired preacher of his time.—I must here remark to you, that the most violent of our modern saints, approve of moral or religious pieces, in the form of a drama.—It is the acting alone that is sinful!—You remember the BIG ENDIANS and the LITTLE ENDIANS?

St. Cyprian says, upon the SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURE “with respect to plays that the divine wisdom would have had a low opinion of christians, had it descended to be more particular in this case !” “O lame and impotent conclusion !”—Cyprian is very explicit in his reasons for feeling a detestation to the existence of a theatre.—To his reasons, with such a provocation, every honest man must subscribe. “*Theatra sunt fœdiora, quo convenis verundia illic omnis exuitur simul cum amictu, vestis honor corporis, et pudor ponitur, denotanda, ac contrectanda, virginitas revelatur.*”

Tertullian has been more diffuse, more absurd, and more inveterate than any of them ;—we will pass by his having fallen into heresy,—this blemish in the life of the holy father, would, upon any other question, have worked considerably to his disadvantage.—But you know, Madam, his being an enemy to the theatre, is a sufficient

apology for all the heresies into which degenerate nature could lead him.—If we may judge from the glaring nonsense he has published against the drama, we may venture to pronounce him a very probable subject to be mislead, or dazzled by the wanderings of his own imagination.—He says; “The Devil mounted the tragedians upon buskins, because he would make our *Saviour a lyar!*”——Passing by the absurdity of the factitious aid of dress giving real height, or breadth, to the human figure—full well must it be known that the cothurni, or high heeled shoes, worn by the greek tragedians, were invented upwards of one thousand years before the birth of our Saviour!!——The learned father seems to have been indefatigable upon the subject, for he has formally recorded twelve reasons against the use of a theatre. ~~—~~Conceiving them to embrace all the serious objections of that age, and finding they have an influence upon a

certain description of people, even to this very day, I think they demand some little of our attention; therefore, with your permission, I will copy them, and we will pass a slight comment on each.

1st. "Because the spirit of the gospel is a spirit of gentleness; but the actors are forced to put themselves into a posture of warmth, and anger, and fury, and the spectators themselves cannot behold them without being put into a passion."

I have certainly seen an audience evince no inconsiderable share of anger at bad acting, indecencies, and improprieties. But I have beheld hundreds of instances, where they have remained tranquil and composed, even at the very time the stage has exhibited some dire, fierce, and **BLOODLESS** conflict.

2d. "Because vanity, which is proper

to the stage, is altogether foreign to christianity."

Were this fantastical lady to be pursued through all her different shades, it would be difficult to determine to whom she legitimately appertains.—Sometimes she will walk demurely under a broad brim hat, at others luxuriate in lawn sleeves;—sometimes she will reason with a philosopher, at others bawl with a field preacher, and even Queen Mab herself cannot exhibit more versatile powers.—At any rate, she is not an exclusive stage property, though frequently brought thither to expose her own absurdities.

3rd. "Because we are not to consent to people's sin."

This ingenious objection we must leave to Rowland Hill, Johanna Southcoate, or any other old woman, deep in mystery to enucleate.

4th. "Because men are abused in these places, and neither princes nor people spared, and this being unlawful elsewhere, must be unlawful upon the stage."

How glorious an eulogium! This is the highest panegyric, upon the stage, I have ever had the good fortune to peruse.—It shews the exalted independence of the dramatic muse, and the boundless extent of her power.—She knows no enemy but vice.—No friend but virtue!—And, until all men are honest, all princes just, all soldiers valiant, all magistrates pure, and all priests sincere, I hope and trust she will fearlessly exercise her jurisdiction, not being biassed by the rank of the culprit, but justly indignant, at the extent of his offence.

5th. "Because all immodesty and scurrility is forbid by the law of the gospel, and not only acting it, but seeing and hearing it acted."

This is as foreign to the existing drama, as a decree of the court of chancery to a subject of Tripoli. These offences would now receive the immediate and summary punishment of the audience, by censure and disapprobation.

6th. "Because all players are hypocrites, seen to be what they are not, and all hypocrisy is condemned by the gospel."

Did you ever, Madam, at a play, imagine Mrs. Siddons was absolutely endeavouring to persuade you she was not Mrs. Siddons, but Queen Catharine?—or Mr. Kemble, that he was really the proud patrician Coriolanus*? —No——one of the great pleasures arising from the exhibition of the art, is, knowing the actors designated

* If identity of person *can really* be absorbed in imaginary character, these are two of the most probable specimens I know to establish the doctrine.

by their separate names; yet, witnessing their skill in expressing the thoughts and actions of others."

With respect to any other latitude given to this offensive word, I have often wished my brethren possessed a share of this modern succedaneum of every virtue. Perhaps, though, we mistake the good father, he might have been speaking literally;—for I believe, Madam, the term hypocrite originated in being applied to the ancient actors, who, by playing in visors, appeared *that which they were not*. How customs change! The stage adepts have dropt the visor; and adepts of another description have taken it up!

7th. "Because the actors very often belie their sex, and put on women's apparel, which is forbid by the law of God."

In the days of Tertullian there were no

actresses, the female characters were represented by youths*. With respect to the change of dress, I am aware the Mosaic law condemns the custom; the reason for which, those versed in the Jewish antiquities, customs and manners, can probably furnish us. I profess my ignorance.—I only know we do not practice the purifications, and the many peculiar and minute regulations to be found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Sth. “ Because these plays dull and damp devotion and seriousness, which is, and ought to be, the indelible character of christians.”

We do not wish to damp pure devotion; on the contrary, it is our desire to fan the flame. We certainly are averse to *dull*

* Female characters were not represented by women upon the english stage until after the restoration.

seriousness. For my own part, Madam, sincerely do I wish the word banished from our vocabulary.—There are at present as many absurdities, impertinences, and follies concealed under the epithet *serious*, as under that of *shaker*.

9th. “Because it is a disparagement to God, to lift up those hands to applaud a player, which we lift up to the throne of grace.”

Ah! my good father, it is not the lifting up the hands but the elevation of the heart that will be acceptable to thy judge and mine!—The mahometans and the eastern idolators lay a stress upon the application and religious uses of the hands, but the enlightened christian looks with contempt and pity upon such puerilities.—If the mind is sincerely devout, the hands will follow in correspondent movements;—nor will it ever be required at the

throne of mercy, what was their previous occupation.

10th. “Because experience shows how the DEVIL hath sometime *possessed* christians in a play-house, and being afterwards cast out, confessed that he had reason to enter them, because he found them in his *own place**.”

* Tertullian very gravely gives us the instance in the following style :

“A certain woman went to the play-house, and brought THE DEVIL HOME with her. And when the unclean spirit was pressed in the *exorcism*, and asked how he DURST ATTACK a christian?—I have done nothing (says he) but what I can justify—for I seized her upon my own ground.”

De Spectaculus, Cap. 26.

But why should this excite surprise? John Wesley in the *eighteenth century*, declared in the presence of a numerous company (Dr. Coke being one) that the whole bench of bishops together,

Oh Madam ! what a *foolish* Devil !
 Had he kept his own council, ! what noble
 sport he would have had upon his royal
 manor !—To scare the game from his net,

could not invalidate the reality of WITCHCRAFT !!!
 He then told a most extraordinary story of a supposed
 murder, which I would relate, but I wish to supply its
 place with a tale recited by a PREACHER, at the same
 meeting.—The subject is a HAUNTED HOUSE, near
 Dungannon, in the North of Ireland.

“ An officer, quartered at that town, one evening
 when rather pot-valiant, went, by himself, to the
 haunted house, knocked at the door, and demanded to
 see the ghost. An old woman who opened the door
 of the cabin, warned him to repress his curiosity, for
 that the GHOST, if provoked, might make him repent
 his intrusion : however, he still persisting, she gave
 him at length admittance ; and he advanced into
 the middle of the floor, when, to his great terror and
 astonishment, he found himself violently assailed by a
 shower of POTATOES from an *invisible* hand, issuing
 from the roof !—On which he rushed forward for
 shelter, and thrust his HEAD up the wide funnel of the
 chimney ; but the GHOST still pursued him with fresh

shows him to have been *then* a very silly Devil indeed, I fancy since that period he is grown a great deal wiser, for he now *makes sure* of his prey, without acquainting us whether he takes it from the tabernacle or the play-house.

11th, “Because no man can serve two masters, God and the World, as those christians pretend to do that frequent both the church and stage*.”

showers of POTATOES down the CHIMNEY, until at length he fled out of the house, battered and bruised, swearing that he got proof enough of the ghost on his head and shoulders.”

Dr. Hale's Methodism Inspected, Part 2nd, p. 42.

* I wonder they have never pressed the Decalogue into the service. Thou shalt not steal—would evidently apply to the author.

Thou shalt not commit murder—might be very appropriately applied to the actors.

No man can serve God and Mammon ; and he who neglects his duty to his Maker, or suffers it to be abstracted by any pursuit, (I care not what it be) commits the crying and greivous sin of ingratitude.—But he who suffers an *amusement* to absorb his devotions, is a contemptible idiot, beneath reproof, and would disgrace correction.—This rule, like most of the objections furnished in the days of the fathers, against the stage, no longer applies. It is nonsense to suppose that a couple of hours of rational entertainment, after the fatigues of a day, can interfere with our duty to God or man. But, in the time Tertullian lived, this caution was absolutely requisite ; for the Roman shows would occupy a whole

Thou shalt not bow down nor bend before any graven image—would be an excellent admonition to those audiences that bestow such enthusiastic applause upon canvas camels, wooden horses, pasteboard men, and basket elephants !

day, and by their pageantry draw off the early christians, not only from their usual avocations, but to the utter neglect of all their religious forms and ceremonies.

12th. "Because, though some speeches in a play are witty and ingenious, yet there is poison at the bottom, and vice is only coloured and gilded with fine language and curious emblems, that it may go down more glibly, and ruin the soul more artificially."

This is the only rule of the twelve that has survived the wreck of time, and still bears a capability of application to the present stage. Any play, confirming the truth of the remarks contained in Tertullian's twelfth objection, should be considered in the most reprehensible point of view, and consigned, with infamy, to oblivion.— But until ALL PLAYS are proved to possess this pernicious inclination, the stage remains

uninjured ! Now, Madam, is it not really lamentable, deplorable, aggravating to the extreme, that a great invention, a sublime art, should be opposed by such an overwhelming mass of nonsense and stupidity :—nor is it the least provoking part, to be conscious of the ungenerous, nefarious mode our opponents take to direct this incongruous, misshapen chaos of absurdities to our disadvantage.—The great and good men who have evinced their approbation of the dramatic art, not only by their countenance, but by their writings, are depreciated, dismissed, with every mark of contempt, decreed ignorant of *true* religion, and denounced as advocates in the service of the Devil ! A St. Cyprian, and a Tertullian, on the contrary, are held forth as beings of the very first order ; whose opinions, upon this *one* subject, are held as sacred oracles, irresistible, irrefragable, and infallible !—Will they direct us where we can find, among the fathers,

a stronger practical lesson upon the belief of christianity, than the death-bed of Addison—the author of two plays, and, during the whole of his life, the warm supporter, friend and encourager of the drama—his final exit displaying and combining the mildness of a christian, with the resolution of a stoic !

Yet a brazen faced sophist has had the temerity to affirm, that “the theatre made even Addison forget his virtue and his creed !” Which of the fathers had the advantage of Dr. Johnson, in moral practice or intellectual excellence ?—Yet he is the writer of a tragedy, and his *chef d’œuvres* are his preface to Shakespear’s works, and his prologue for the opening of Drury-lane theatre.

Where will they find, in the whole round of antiquity, a name superior to Milton ?—Why should they invidiously

pass him over, ransack the dust for beings known only by their polemical squabbles, and venerable only for the magnitude and ponderosity of their heavy folios.—Even if you did not coincide with me in opinion upon this subject, yet such is the superior discrimination and native ingenuousness of your mind, that you would pronounce yourself a convert to the stage, by a single perusal of Milton's preface to his Sampson Agonistes.]

“Tragedy,” says he, “as it was anciently composed, has been held the GREATEST MORALIST and most profitable of all other poems: therefore said by ARISTOTLE to be of power, by raising piety and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure, with a kind of delight, stirred up by the reading, or SEEING those passions well imitated. Hence philosophers and

other grave writers, as **CICERO**, **PLUTARCH**, and others, frequently cite out of tragic poets, both to **ADORN** and illustrate their discourse. The **APOSTLE PAUL** himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of **Euripides** into the **TEXT** of **HOLY SCRIPTURE**. **I. Cor. C. 15. v. 38.**—And **Peræus**, commenting on the **REVELATION**, divides the whole book as a **TRAGEDY** into **ACTS**, distinguished each by a chorus of heavenly harpings and songs between.”

“ Heretofore **MEN IN THE HIGHEST DIGNITY** have laboured not a little to be thought able to compose a **TRAGEDY**. Of that honour **Dionysius the elder**, was no less ambitious than before of his attaining the tyranny. **AUGUSTUS CÆSAR**, also had begun his **AJAX**, but unable to please his own judgment with what he had begun, left it unfinished. **SENECA** the philosopher, is by some thought the author of those tragedies (at least the best of them) that

go under his name. GREGORY NAZIANZEN, a FATHER OF THE CHURCH, thought it not unbecoming the sanctity of his person, to WRITE a TRAGEDY, which he entitled, CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS !''

Now, Madam, what say you to the strong evidence in our favour, thus furnished by a religious poet, and latin secretary to the puritanical Oliver, whose attainments as a scholar, whose skill as a poet, and whose integrity as a man, stands unimpeachable?

It is with extreme regret I feel myself under the necessity of detaining you a few minutes longer in this disgusting investigation, but I have yet in reserve, a few more absurdities, to which I must call your attention.

Jeremy Collier, a name high in the list of our correctors, having given some

instances of the lamentable pruriencies, to be found in the writers of his day, proceeds to the accusation of profaneness: He then particularizes. Some of his extracts, I will furnish you with, that you may feel the full value of his pindaric flight.

VALENTINE, in LOVE FOR LOVE; says
"I am Truth, I am Truth.—Who's that that's out of his way?—I am Truth, and can set him right."

LADY BRUTE, in THE PROVOKED WIFE, observes
"The part of a down-right wife, is to cuckold her husband:—and though this is against the strict statute law of religion, yet if there were a Court of Chancery in Heaven, she should be sure to cast him."

YOUNG FASHION in THE RELAPSE, when plotting against his elder brother, remarks to his servant: *"Eory, Providence*

thou seest, at last, takes care of men of merit.”—BERINTHIA says to AMANDA: “*Mr. Worthy used you like a text, he took you all to pieces:*”—and she concludes with this pious exhortation, “*Now consider what has been said, and Heaven give you grace to put it in practice.*”

Mr. Collier declares, “There are few of these last quotations but what are plain blasphemy, and within the LAW. They look reeking as if it were from PANDÆMONIUM, and almost smell of fire and brimstone. This is an eruption of Hell with a witness! I almost wonder the smoke of it has not darkened the sun, and turned the air to plague and poison! These are outrageous provocations; enough to arm all nature in revenge; to exhaust the judgments of Heaven, and sink the island into the sea!!!”

Observe, that I am far from considering

these profane passages, or any similar to them, justifiable.—No —I deeply deplore the propensity, that too many dramatic writers have, for trifling with opinions, from whence wit should not be elicited, nor into which ridicule should not be infused. Had I my Lord Chamberlain's pen to exercise, upon the new pieces, I must candidly confess, it would be very freely employed in the erasure of those lively jests, too imbecile to be impious, and too dull to be witty. viz. “ I would shake hands with Old Nick.”——“ A fig for all the saints in the calendar, &c. &c. &c.—But to imagine the follies of all the poets that ever existed, could poison the air, darken the sun, and sink the island, is forming an idea so base, so puerile, so unworthy of the great enlightened incomprehensible Creator, as to make it a doubt which is the most reprehensible, the poet, or the right reverend critic.

The next in order, gives me a considerable degree of pain to drag to public light, and it is with no small degree of diffidence, I proceed to the attack of an opinion emanating from a man of known genius and splendid abilities.—“ But men are but men.”—And when I reflect upon the violent adversary of the amiable Fenelon, I am released from a great part of my astonishment, in perusing the following invective of the right reverend Bishop of Meaux, against the stage, and the high panegyric upon the ISRAELITES ! He says, “ They had no shows to entertain but their feasts, their sacrifices, and their holy ceremonies. They were formed, by their constitution, to a plain and natural way of living : they knew nothing of these fancies and inventions of Greece ; so that to the praise that Balaam gives them, that there is no enchantment in Jacob, nor divination in Israel, we may likewise add, there was no THEATRE among them, nothing of these

dangerous amusements to be met with :—
 This INNOCENT and UNDEBAUCHED people
 took their recreations at home, and made
 their children their diversion !”

That the learned Bossuet should so
 far suffer prejudice to cloud his reason and
 fetter his understanding, is indeed a subject
 not more for astonishment than regret. To
 find a man of his elevated rank in the
 republic of letters, eulogising the Hebrews,
 and giving them the pre-eminence to all
 the splendid nations of antiquity, must
 ever stand as an extraordinary aberration
 of genius, and be classed as a phenomena
 in literature.—What could recommend
 them so particularly to his notice ? Was
 it their perverseness, their ingratitude, their
 cruelty ?—Was it their inclination for war,
 their blood-thirsty revenge, their intolle-
 rance, their villainy, their superstition,
 their pertinacious ignorance ?—Where are
 their virtues recorded ? In vain do we

search for them in their own historians; from Moses down to Josephus, it is but a melancholy catalogue of the base qualities I have enumerated. A people possessing all the brutal vices of the ancients, without the display of their virtues, or the adornment of their elegancies. A people whom neither mercy could conciliate, nor miracles convince*.

A people, that of all others, required a theatre to improve their morals, and ameliorate their manners.

Let their own writers speak for them.
 “ And they tempted God in their heart, by
 “ asking meat for their lusts.”

“ How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy
 “ children have forsaken me, and sworn by

* God's pamper'd people, whom, debauch'd with ease,
 No King could govern, and no God could please.

DRYDEN.

“ them that are no Gods ; when I have fed
 “ them to the full, then they committed
 “ adultery and assembled themselves by
 “ troops in the harlots houses. They were
 “ as fed horses in the morning, and every
 “ one neighed after his neighbour’s wife.”

“ Hear the word of the Lord, ye
 “ children of Israel, for the Lord hath a
 “ controversy with the inhabitants of the
 “ land, because there is no truth, nor mercy,
 “ nor knowledge of God in the land. By
 “ SWEARING, and LYING, and STEALING, and
 “ COMMITTING ADULTERY, they break out,
 “ and BLOOD toucheth BLOOD !”

Such were the amusements of this
innocent and undebauched people.*.

* When I express myself thus about the ancient
 Jews, I do not mean the smallest irreverence to their
 great and holy men.—No—their characters are too
 exalted to be the subject either of my panegyric or
 satire. I speak only of the nation at large.

Now, Madam, I will give you two happy specimens of downright stupid *puritanism*.

“ A remarkable judgment followed on *Herod Agrippa*, who appearing ON THE STAGE in a silver robe of admirable workmanship, and being received by the acclamations of the people AS A GOD, because of the beams which darted from his apparel, by the reflection of the sun, was immediately smitten with a grievous disease, by something that appeared in the shape of AN OWL, hovering over his head; and being tormented for five days with an intollerable pain in his bowels, was at last miserably devoured by worms !” The Lord *presarve* us !!!

This will only excite your laughter; the next will most sensibly call forth your indignation and reprobation ! — It is a liberal opinion proclaimed from the pulpit,

in one of the churches of Kingston-upon-Hull, in the year 1792. I take it verbatim, from Mr. Wilkinson's Wandering Patentee, (the late manager of the York and Hull theatres.)

“ NO PLAYER or any of his CHILDREN ought to be intitled to a CHRISTIAN BURIAL, or even to lie in a CHURCH YARD ! Not ONE of them can be *saved* !—And THOSE who ENTER a play-house, are equally certain with the players of ETERNAL DAMNATION !—No player can be an honest man ! ! ”

It is utterly undeserving of any comment ; if the man should be now living and capable of reflection, I leave him to the comforts of his own consolation.—If he has departed, it is my duty to forgive him, and leave the above on record, as a memento of his crime !

I cannot in justice close my retrospective examination, without registering the opinion of Jeremy Collier upon the drama. The praise of an enemy, Madam, must be ever valuable.—Collier was our severe accuser, yet he says, “The business of plays, is to commend virtue, and discountenance vice; to shew the uncertainty of human greatness, the sudden turns of fate, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice; ’tis to expose the singularities of pride and fancy, to make folly and falsehood contemptible, and to bring every thing that is ill under infamy and neglect.” He further says, “The wit of man cannot invent any thing more conducive to virtue and destructive of vice than the drama, and I grant the ABUSE of a THING is NO ARGUMENT against the USE of it.”—I have kept this by way of a *bonne bouche*. He was the most formidable of our opponents, and like Prynne, has furnished

the subsequent vain antagonists with food for calumny and aspersion.

And now permit me to congratulate you and myself, for having at length waded through this strange medley; and you will now possibly inquire for the necessity of collecting all these absurdities? My good Madam, the obliquy thrown upon the stage professors has originated from these extravagant flights. From this source the Romish clergy imbibed the presumptuous audacity to withhold christian interment from actors. From these mouldy documents the puritans pertinaciously and zealously have contended for the demolition of the stage, and the suppression of the drama.—To these antiquated notions I am indebted for slights that disgrace me in my own eyes, and depreciate me in the estimation of the world.—I therefore entertain a hope, that by this candid view of the ancient stage, with the minute

examination into the opinions of its cotemporary accusers, I shall have fully exposed the impropriety of calling them in to decide upon any dispute that may arise, on this long contended subject, in the nineteenth century. I likewise wish to lead the contending parties to a more rational exercise of their energies, by urging them to a calm investigation of the thing itself, its merits and its defects; the good derived, or the evils arising from its existence, for the last TWO CENTURIES. If we are to be abused, let me entreat them to exercise their ingenuity, and furnish us with some novelty in their censures. Do not let us be stunned by the repetition of quotations incapable of application; sentences without sense, and philippics without poignancy. I received much amusement in meeting with an attack upon the stage by a CHINESE writer,—with great pleasure and frankness I present it to our English assailants, and hope it will stimulate them to emulation.

“Plays are fire-works of wit, to be viewed only on the night of leisure. They degrade and dirty those who let them off; they fatigue the delicate eyes of the sages; they supply dangerous ruminations to idleness; they stain the women and the children who approach too often and too near; they make a smoke and a stink more lasting than the gaiety of their light; they dazzle but to mislead; and they often occasion ruinous conflagration!”

This, Madam, is a brilliant display of philosophical fire-works, for the amusement of our friends!—Its coruscations will not be dimmed, nor its figurative excellence be diminished, by my declaring the Chinese stage is exactly upon a par with the original cart of Thespis, constructed in the same manner, and degraded by a similar jumble of puerilities, indecencies, and improbabilities, the witnessing of which would excite as much indignation

in the breast of a Chinese Confucius, as it did of old in the bosom of the Athenian Solon.

To revert once more to the Heathen philosophers and church fathers, there seems something very unaccountable and perverse in our rigid sectaries, looking up to them for instruction upon any subject. Why should they require any other guide than that set down and bequeathed to us, by our great master and his disciples?

Why should they, upon every trivial occasion of life, refer us to the scripture for instruction and information, and yet upon the subject OF STAGE, OR NO STAGE, a subject they have themselves magnified, as a matter of the greatest importance; why wish to deprive us of every advantage the gospel may hold forth, and, by collecting a heap of rubbish, endeavour to hide it from our view?

What claim to our attention can the Heathen philosophers, or early christian fathers possess, upon a present speculative point?—I mean, Madam, it is so far speculative, that a nation can exist, and probably flourish without a theatre—so it could if deprived of poetry—of painting—of music—of statuary—or even of **METHODISM**!—For my own part, the philosophers and fathers I boldly reject; I disclaim subjection to their jurisdiction in theatricals, and make my appeal at once to the scripture, the proper guide for christians! If the practice of the present stage be not at variance with the precepts of our Saviour and his disciples, if that divine record does not positively condemn our pursuits, I shall remain as perfectly indifferent upon this subject, to the opinions of Tertullian and Cyprian, as I should be to the *ipse dixit* of **TOM O'NOKES**, or **JOHN O'SYLES!!!**

H

And now, Madam, with every sense of gratitude for your attention and perseverance, I respectfully take my leave, by subscribing myself,

Madam,

Your most obedient,

Much obliged, humble Servant,

Robert Mansel.

HULL, JANUARY, 1814.

Father Caffaro's Letter

UPON THE

Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of the Stage;

WITH A

BRIEF INTRODUCTION.



INTRODUCTION.

WHEN I had the good fortune to encounter Father Caffaro's discourse, it struck me as a most suitable prolegomena to a stage-defence.—I hailed him as a powerful ally—I congratulated myself upon meeting with an ecclesiastic who had undertaken the task of investigating the objections started by the earlier churchmen, and combating them upon their own grounds. I conceive (however the world might despise my feeble efforts, or condemn the liberties I have taken with opinions rendered venerable by antiquity and sacred by prescription) the religious and conscientious would pay some degree of deference to one of their own community.—Nor must my illustrious coadjutor be rejected because he was of a different persuasion to our.

present adversaries, nor reproached with the terms of PAPIST and JESUIT to depreciate his candour, industry and information. It was my design (as I have premised) to have made him my introducer to the public, and under his venerable protection, I might perhaps have more certainly commanded respect and attention, but some considerable time having elapsed from the final arrangement of "Free Thoughts," to the period of delivering the work into the hands of my publisher, I had leisure, opportunity, and inclination to collect fresh matter, and I was tempted to throw it into the form of a prefatory letter, by which means the learned professor is removed from the *van* to the *centre*. He therefore (to pursue the metaphor) loses the post of honour, and my antagonists may take advantage of the undisciplined state, and badly marshalled system, evident in the *van* and *rear*—but my *centre* will remain inviolable, and bid defiance to all their arts and all their efforts.

Father *Caffaro's* letter, or rather the translation, is prefixed to a tragedy written by a Mr. *Motteux*, called BEAUTY IN DISTRESS, published in the year 1698—It appears the English dramatist was himself labouring under some conscientious scruples, and applied for satisfaction on that head, to a DIVINE of the CHURCH of ENGLAND, who favoured him with the following answer.

TO MR. MOTTEUX,

AUTHOR OF THE TRAGEDY CALLED

“BEAUTY IN DISTRESS,”

Concerning the Lawfulness and Unlawfulness of Plays.

SIR,

Since you have been pleased to desire my opinion about the lawfulness or unlawfulness of writing plays for the stage, I shall give it you with all the freedom and impartiality which becomes one of my function. Upon reflecting on the present management of our theatres, on the actions, humours, and characters, which are daily represented there, which are for the most part so lewd and immodest, as to tend very much to the debauching the youth and gentry of our English nation ; I might very well dissuade you from giving any countenance to such unmanly practices, by offering any of your works to the service of the stage.

But though theatrical representations are become an offence and scandal to most, yet I am not of *their*

mind, who think plays are absolutely unlawful, and the best way to REFORM is wholly to suppress them; for certainly THEY MIGHT BE OF VERY GREAT USE NOT ONLY FOR THE DIVERSION AND PLEASURE, BUT ALSO FOR THE CORRECTION AND INFORMATION OF MANKIND. It is no crime to eat or drink, but the sin lies in the excessive and immoderate use, or rather abuse of those things, which we either eat or drink; the case is much the same with plays. In their own nature they are innocent and harmless diversions; but then indeed they become sinful and unlawful, to be made, acted, or seen, when they transgress the bounds of virtue and religion; shock our nature; put our modesty to the blush; imprint nauseous and unbecoming images on our minds; and, in a word, when they are such as are a scandal to the author, and an offence to the audience.

I am not willing to believe so hardly of the age (though it is bad enough of all conscience) but that most of the persons who frequent the theatres would be as well pleased to see a play of decorum and modesty acted, as they would be to see a lewd and atheistical comedy. It is upon this consideration that I am willing to encourage you in your design of writing plays for the stage; for you have too much prudence, honour and conscience, to subject the SACRED NINE to base and servile ends. It is to be hoped, that such as you may be a means of

reforming the abuses of the stage, and of shewing the world that a poet may be a man of sense and parts, without renouncing his virtue.

I shall not trouble you at present with any farther thoughts of my own, but will give you the sentiments of a very judicious divine upon this subject.

It seems he was consulted by a gentleman, whether plays were lawful or not, and whether he might in conscience exercise his parts that way? to this the divine replies, shewing how far plays are lawful and necessary, and when they become unlawful and sinful: the resolutions of these will, I trust, come up to your purpose. By this judicious dissertation, you will find your whole desire satisfied.—You will perceive he has brought the schoolmen to speak in favour of the DRAMA, and has explained the invectives of the fathers against it, so as to make them on its side. He has answered the most material objections which can be brought against the stage, and given very necessary precautions to such as go to the play-houses.—You will perceive he is a French divine, (Father Caffaro, brother to the Duke of ——) one of the Romish religion, who has given us his thoughts in the form of a letter; and it is in behalf of the plays acted in FRANCE that he argues. But were he to see our English stage, he would never

say such fine things of it; unless he saw it stocked only with plays and entertainments innocently diverting and strictly moral, as those which you have hitherto so successfully published, are generally allowed to be.

With a compliment to Mr. Motteux upon his "BEAUTY IN DISTRESS," which it would be superfluous transcribing, his reverence subscribes himself,

SIR,

Your real friend to serve you,

1697—8.

This tragedy is likewise honoured by some of Mr. Dryden's lines to the author being affixed to the piece. Their application comes so immediately home to the views of the present opposers of dramatic amusement, that I cannot resist my wish to give them a place, previous to entering upon the learned Father's discourse.

TO MY FRIEND THE AUTHOR.

'Tis hard, my friend, to write in such an age,
As damns not only poets, but the stage.
That sacred art, by Heav'n itself infus'd,
Which MOSES, DAVID, SOLOMON have us'd,
Is now to be no more: The muses foes
Would sink their Maker's praises into prose.

Were they content to prune the lavis vine
 Of straggling branches, and improve the wine,
 Who but a madman would his faults defend?
 All would submit, for all but fools would mend.
 But, when to common sense, they give the lie,
 And turn distorted words to blasphemy,
 They give the scandal; and the wise discern,
 Their glosses teach an age too apt to learn.
 What I have loosely or profanely writ,
 Let them to fires (their due desert) commit.
 Nor when accus'd by me, let *them* complain:
 Their faults, and not their functions, I arraign.
 Rebellion, worse than witchcraft, they pursu'd;
 The pulpit preach'd the crime: the people ru'd.
 The stage was silenc'd: FOR THE SAINTS WOULD SEE
 IN FIELDS PERFORM'D THEIR PLOTTED TRAGEDY.
 But let us first reform: and then so live,
 That we may teach our teachers to forgive,
 Our desk be plac'd below their lofty chairs,
 Our's be the practice, as the precept theirs.
 The moral part at least we may divide,
 Humility reward, and punish pride:
 Ambition, int'rest, avarice accuse:
 These form the province of the tragic muse.

There are upwards of twenty lines following these,
 (highly flattering to the poetical character of Mr.
 Motteux; but as he has not had the good fortune to
 survive the sweeping influence of two centuries) it
 would only be trespassing on the reader's time and
 indulgence by making the addition.

Father Caffaro having quoted only THREE TEXTS applied by the opponents of the drama against the use of the stage, viz. Isaiah c. 3. v. 16, 17. I. Cor. c. 10. v. 7. I. Thes. c. 5. v. 22.—I am compelled by candour, a love of truth, and the strong desire of having the question tried upon scriptural ground, to add those texts I have met with in various authors who have written upon this subject. Proverbs c. 23. v. 1. Matt. c. 5. v. 28. Luke, c. 8. v. 14. John, c. 2. v. 16. Rom. c. 13. v. 13, 14. Gal. c. 5. v. 16. Eph. c. 5. v. 4. Col. c. 3. v. 2, 3, 5, 8.—c. 4. v. 6. I. Tim. c. 2. v. 5, 6, 9. II. Tim. c. 2. v. 3, 4. Titus c. 3. v. 3. James, c. 4. v. 3. I. Pet. c. 1. v. 17.—c. 5. v. 8.

I have myself diligently sought after, and attentively perused those several passages; but such is my blindness, ignorance, or stupidity, I cannot for the life of me discover the smallest affinity between the different verses and the thing under reprobation. However, conviction being my object, I shall ever consider myself indebted to that man who will prove, to my satisfaction, the propriety of applying them to the condemnation of the drama.

A LETTER

FROM THE

Learned Father CAFFARO,

Professor of Divinity in Paris,

TO A

DRAMATIC WRITER,

*Who had, from conscientious scruples, consulted
the Reverend Divine, upon the Lawfulness
or Unlawfulness of Writing for the Stage:*

WRITTEN IN THE YEAR 16—.



SIR,

I HAVE avoided as much as I could, giving you my opinion in writing, about plays, considering the delicacy of the subject, and my own incapacity. But since you press me still to cure you of that scrupulous fear which lies upon your mind, I must pass over those two difficulties, choosing rather to expose myself on your account, than not to ease you of your doubts. In truth, Sir, the more I examine the holy fathers, the more I read the

divines, and consult the casuists, the less able I find myself to determine any thing in this matter. I had no sooner found something in favour of the Drama among the schoolmen, WHO ARE ALMOST ALL OF THEM FOR ALLOWING IT, but I perceived myself surrounded with abundance of passages out of the Councils, and the Fathers, who have all of them declared against public shows*.—This question would have been soon determined, if the HOLY SCRIPTURE HAD SAID ANY THING ABOUT it. But, as Tertullian very well observes, “We no where find that we are as expressly forbidden in scripture to go to the circus and theatre, to see the fightings of gladiators, or be assisting in any show, as we are forbid to worship idols, or the being guilty of murder, treason, and adultery.” IF YOU READ THE SCRIPTURES OVER AND OVER, YOU WILL NEVER MEET WITH ANY EXPRESS AND PARTICULAR PRECEPT AGAINST PLAYS. The fathers assert, that we cannot in conscience be any ways assisting to the drama. The schoolmen maintain the contrary: let us therefore endeavour to make use of St. Cyprian’s rule, who says, *that reason is to be heard, where Holy Writ is silent*; and let us try to reconcile the conclusions of the divines, with the determination of the fathers of the church. But because it is a very delicate point, and the question consists in reconciling them together, I will not

* Vide Introductory letter, page 37—53.

advance any thing of my own sentiments, but bring *St. Thomas Aquinas* to speak for me; who being on one side a religious father, and holy doctor of the church; and, on the other side, the angel of the school, the master and head of all the divines, he seems to me the most proper of any to reconcile the disagreeing opinions of both parties.

In the second part of his "SUMMS," among others, he starts this question: "What ought we to think of sports and diversions?" And he returns an answer to himself, that provided they are moderate, they are not only free from sin, but in some measure good, and conformable to that virtue, which Aristotle stiles *Eutrapelia*, whose business it is to set just bounds to our pleasures. The reason which he alledges for it is this: *A man being fatigued by the serious actions of life, requires an agreeable refreshment, which he can find no where so well as in plays:* and to support his opinion, he quotes St. Augustin, who says, "I would have you take care of yourself, for it is the part of a wise man, sometimes to unbend his mind, which is too intent upon his business."

"Now, (continues St. Thomas) how can this relaxation of the mind be effected, if not by diverting words or actions? 'Tis not therefore sinful, or unbecoming a wise and virtuous man, to allow himself some innocent pleasures."—

Aquinas even accounts it a sin to refrain from diversion:—"Because whatever is contrary to
 " reason is vicious; now it is contrary to reason
 " that a man should be so unsociable and hard upon
 " others as to oppose their innocent pleasures, never
 " to bear a part in their diversions, or contribute
 " to them by his words or actions. Therefore
 " Seneca very justly and reasonably says;—"Let
 " your conversation be so tempered with prudence
 " and discretion, that none may charge you with
 " being sullen, or despise you as one unfit for social
 " conversation: for it is a vice to quarrel with all
 " mankind, and thus to be imputed a morose and
 " savage creature."

It is easy to determine, that the Father comprehends the stage under the general term of recreations, by his recommending agreeable words and actions for the relaxation of the mind.—This is the peculiar province of plays, being composed of wit and action, such as produce delight, and recreate the mind. I do not think you will find in any other diversion words and actions thus combined together.

But let us attend once more to this great scholar,
 " It seems (says he) as if these players who spend
 " their whole lives on the stage, did transgress the
 " bounds of innocent diversion. If then excessive
 " diversions be a sin (as indubitably it is) the players
 " are in a state of sin; and so likewise are all those

“ who assist at stage representations, and they who
 “ give any thing to them are abettors of their sin.—
 “ Yet this appears false, for we read in the lives of
 “ the fathers, that one day it was revealed to St.
 “ *Paphnutius*, that in the other life he should not
 “ arrive to a higher degree of glory than a certain
 “ player.”

If this objection, started by St. Thomas, appears too strong, his answer is at once satisfactory, delicate, and solid. “ Diversion (adds the Doctor) being
 “ necessary for the comfort of human life, we may
 “ appoint several employments for this end which
 “ are lawful. Thus the employment of players
 “ being established to afford men an honest
 “ recreation, has nothing in it, in my mind, which
 “ deserves to be prohibited ; and I do not look upon
 “ them to be in a state of sin, provided they make
 “ use of this sort of recreation with moderation ;
 “ neither speaking nor acting any thing which is
 “ unlawful ; mixing nothing that is sacred with
 “ profane ; and never acting in a prohibited time.
 “ And though they may have no other employment
 “ of life, like other men, yet between them and
 “ their God, they have often very serious employ-
 “ ments—such as when they pray to their maker,
 “ govern their passions, and give alms to the poor.
 “ —From hence I conclude, that those who in
 “ moderation pay or assist them, are guilty of no
 “ sin, but do an act of justice, since they only give

“ them the reward of their labour. But if any one
 “ should squander his whole estate upon them, or
 “ countenance players who act after a scandalous
 “ and unlawful way, I make no question but that
 “ he sins, and gives them encouragement to sin;
 “ and ’tis in this sense St. Agustines words are to
 “ be taken when he says, *That to give ones estate*
 “ *away to players, is rather a vice than a virtue.*”

To prove that it is only **THE EXCESS** which
 ought to be condemned in all sports and diversions,
 and that the holy fathers had no other design in
 declaiming against plays, St. Thomas describes
 what he means by excess, and lays it down as an
 indispensable maxim, that every thing should be
 regulated according to reason, and whatever trans-
 gresses this rule, is to be reckoned superfluous, and
 that which does not come up to it defective:—
 “ Now,” continues he “ diverting words and
 “ actions may be regulated according to reason:—
 “ The excess therefore in them is, when they do
 “ not agree to this rule, or are defective by the
 “ circumstances which ought to be applied to
 “ them.”

It is upon this system that we ought to return an
 answer to the authorities of the fathers of the church,
 since, according to St. Thomas, they declaim only
 against the excess in plays, and we shall offer
 nothing from ourselves on this subject, but what

shall be in imitation of this great Doctor, who replying to *one*, intends it as an answer to *ALL*, which is the case when he comments upon the observations of St. Chrysostom.

That eloquent father had said, that it was not God who was the author of sports, but the Devil; and the more to back what he had advanced, produced this passage out of holy writ; *The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.* But St. Thomas is for having those words of the great Chrysostom to be understood of excessive and immoderate sports, and he adds, that excess in play is a foolish pleasure, stiled by St. Gregory, the daughter of gluttony and sin; and that in this sense it is written that the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play*.—This is the answer which we are to make to whatever may be objected

* I tremble at my temerity in presuming to give an opinion upon a text in so learned and venerable a company; but we frequently look for happiness in the clouds, when it is beneath our feet—and plain unlettered sense, may sometimes discover what the refinement of the schools will envelope with mystery.—It strikes me, that the real interpretation of the text is a reproach to gluttony, which they sit down to enjoy—i. e. prolong it so as to make it the business of their lives—and when they rise, it is merely to trifle. Our revered Shakespeare has expressed himself upon another subject nearly in the same manner. “You rise to *PLAY*, and go to bed to *WORK*.”

R. M.

against us out of the fathers; and the rather, because in examining them without prejudice it is easy to perceive that if they did declaim so much against the drama, it was only because in their times its expressions were criminal and immoderate; whereas had they seen it as it is now a-days in France, conformable to goodness and right reason, they would not have inveighed against it. But plays, as they were acted in the time of our forefathers, were so abominable and infamous, that those pious men could not but employ their greatest zeal against a thing which was so very offensive to the church. For is it not the EXCESS of plays, for instance against which *Tertullian* cries out*?—"Let us not" says he "go to the theatre, which is a particular scene of immodesty and debauchery, where nothing is liked but what is disapproved elsewhere; and what is thought most excellent, is commonly what is infamous and lewd. A player, for instance, acts there with the most shameful and naked gestures; women, forgetting the modesty of their sex, dare do that on the stage, and in the view of all the world, which others would blush to commit at home, where no body could see them. There the most disgusting scenes are represented by the infamous victims of public debauchery, most wretchedly and shamefully exposed to the view of such women as are supposed

* Vide introductory letter, page 40—53.

“to be ignorant of such licentiousness.—They are
 “there made the subject of the young men’s mirth;
 “there you are directed to the place where they
 “reside; there they will tell you how much they
 “get by their infamous trade, and there, in a
 “word, those prostitutes are commended, in the
 “presence of those who ought to be ignorant of all
 “those things. I say nothing (adds this father)
 “of what ought to be buried in eternal silence, for
 “fear that by barely mentioning such horrid actions
 “I should in some measure be guilty of them.*”

But the other fathers are not so reserved as he,
 and make no scruple to discover all they know about
 it. You must not imagine that I am ambitious of

* Let us hope (for the honour of human nature) that
 the zeal and the peculiar circumstances of the holy fathers
 imperceptibly led them to exaggerate the improprieties of
 the ancient stage. Prurient it certainly was, and repre-
 hensible to a lamentable extent; yet I am inclined to think
 the description given by the ecclesiastics, over-charged.—
 Tertullian, in the above invective, talking of the Roman
 youth being directed to the residence of the Cyprian fair,
 and being made acquainted with the profits of infamy,
 evidently alludes to Terence, who has generally employed
 a courtesan, as one of his agents for carrying on the plot.

Yet however deficient Terence may be in want of moral
 in his pieces. (the common failing of the ancient drama) the
 most fastidious critic could not condemn him to the full
 extent of the father’s exclamation.

R. M.

quoting all they have said: Those matters which are so freely described in another language, might prove offensive in ours; therefore I will only leave you to guess what enormities they have mentioned, by some of those lesser infamies of which I dare give an account out of their writings.

Salvian was afraid to say any thing about it:—
 “Who” says he “can treat of those shameful
 “representations, those dishonest speeches, and of
 “those lascivious and immodest actions, the
 “enormity and offence of which are discoverable
 “by that restraint which they in their own nature
 “impose upon us not to rehearse them?”

Lactantius is not so reserved, his most favourable thoughts about it are these:—“To what end do
 “those impudent actions of the players tend, but to
 “debauch the youth of the age? Their effeminate
 “bodies in womens dresses, represent the most
 “lascivious gestures of the most dissolute.” And a
 little lower he says, “from the licentiousness of
 “speech, they proceed to that of action, &c. &c.*”
 Pray be you judge whether all this can be acceptable
 to modesty?

* Vide introductory letter, page 40. Also, origin of
 the stage, *ibid.* page 16.

St. Cyprian, who, *ex professo*, composed a book of public shows, describes at large all the infamous practices there. We may also read something of that abominable custom of their appearing naked on the theatres in St. Chrysostom, St. Jerom, and St. Augustin. The first of these does not scruple comparing those of his time who went to plays to *David*, who took pleasure in seeing *Bathsheba* naked in her bath, and saying that the theatre is a rendezvous of all manner of debaucheries, that 'tis full of impudence, abomination and impiety. A more modern writer (*Alexander ab Alexander*) describing the shows of the ancients, and especially their Bacchanalia, gives us such horrible pictures of their public infamies and prostitutions, that I should tremble to repeat them. You may imagine, Sir, there could be nothing of good in them, since the infamous *Heliogabalus* was the author of some of them. But least you should suppose that plays were much the same as they are now, and that it was only to dissuade the faithful from frequenting the stage, that the fathers represented it in such frightful colours; let us consult profane authors. *Valerius Maximus*, speaking of the detestable custom which the Romans had of exposing upon the theatres the naked bodies of debauched women, and the naked bodies of young boys, relates of *M. P. Cato*, that he being one day at those sights, and understanding, by his favourite *Favonius*, that out of the respect which they bore to him, the people were ashamed

to desire the players should appear naked on the theatre; this great man withdrew, that he might not by his presence hinder that which was so customary*. *Seneca* gives us the same account of *Cato*, and commends him for his being unwilling to see those debauched women naked. I dare not repeat to you the words of *Lampridius*, because they are too gross, when he says that the Emperor *Heliogabalus*, who in a play represented *Venus*, shewed himself in a complete state of nudity, with the most impudent intrepidity of assurance. We also find that the public shows of the ancients were as dreadfully impious as they were immoral. "There," says St. Chrysostom, "they blaspheme the name of God, and no sooner have the players vented a blasphemous expression, but a loud applause follows. This is what obliged the third council of Carthage, by a canon, to condemn players as blasphemers: let not the LAICKS themselves be present at the shows, for it has been always unlawful for any christian to go into the company of blasphemers†."

* This refers entirely to all sorts of *Ludi Scenici*. The *Mimi*, *Pantomimi* and *Archimimi*, but reflects no more discredit upon the *Histriones*, than the humours of PUNCH, or the buffoonery of a clown to a horse ring, militate against the refined wit of polished comedy. R. M.

† This corroborates what I have stated in my "FREE THOUGHTS," that the early INSTRUCTORS in christianity

Now who would not cry down the stage, if it were so full of immorality and profaneness? There is no need of being one of the fathers, the light of nature is sufficient to condemn so great an excess. Thus we read in St. Chrysostom, "That certain Barbarians, having heard of those theatral plays, expressed themselves in those terms worthy of the greatest philosophers.—" It is fit that the Romans, when they invented this kind of pleasure, should be looked upon as persons who had neither wives nor children'." And Alcibiades, among other things, is commended for having cast a certain comedian, named Eupolis, into the sea, for being so impudent as to repeat some infamous verses in his presence*; adding at his punishment this expression. "Thou hast plunged me often into the debaucheries of the stage, and for once I will plunge thee into the depths of the sea."

used to frequent the theatre. Why should Chrysostom say, let not the Laicks THEMSELVES, &c. if it did not imply that in his time the CLERGY had deviated from THEIR FATHERS, and abandoned the dramatic amusement. See in "Free Thoughts" the account of St. Paul at Ephesus. R. M.

* Had Alcibiades existed in our days, and possessing all his admirable propensities; no comedian of repute would honour him with a reading. It was probably some wretch worthless as himself—only what the General wanted in virtue, he made up by power.—So much for the pupil of SOCRATES. R. M.

You may easily perceive, Sir, that all those passages out of the fathers, and a thousand others which I could produce out of them against the stage-plays, prove nothing against the drama as it now stands in France. It would be superfluous to make a comparison between the one and the other: I desire that you would only take notice that far from weakening the doctrine of *St. Thomas*, all that has been hitherto alleged serves only to strengthen it; for it is only against the excess of the stage that the fathers appeared so zealous, whereas if they had found it divested of those unhappy circumstances which then attended it, they would have been of *St. Thomas's* opinion, and at least have looked upon it as indifferent.

I thought proper to relate all this to you before I ventured my own thoughts upon the subject; and upon those indisputable principles which I have laid down, I affirm, that in my judgment, plays, in their own nature and taken in themselves, independent from any other circumstance, whether good or bad, ought to be reckoned among the number of things purely indifferent. Upon due examination you will find it to be the opinion even of *Tertullian* and *St. Cyprian*, the two who seem to declaim most against the drama.

To begin with *Tertullian*, at the same time that he abominates the infamy of public shows he starts

this objection to himself:—"God has made all things, and given them to men, and consequently they are all good, such as the CIRCUS, lions, voices, &c. What then makes the use of them unlawful?" To this he answers, "That it is true all things were instituted by God, but that they were corrupted by the evil spirit: that iron for instance, is as much God's creature as plants and angels: that notwithstanding this, God did not make these creatures to be instruments of murder, poison, and MAGIC, though men by their wickedness deprave them to those uses; and that what renders a great many things evil, which in their own nature are indifferent, is not their institution but corruption."—From hence, if we apply this way of arguing to public shows, it follows, that considered in their own nature, they are as harmless as angels, plants, and iron; but that it is the evil spirit that has changed, perverted, and spoiled them. You see then that Tertullian has reckoned stage-plays among indifferent actions, and what he condemns in them is only the excess.

St. Cyprian, speaking of David's dancing before the Ark, owns that there is no harm in dancing or singing, "but yet," says he, "this is no excuse for christians who are present at those lascivious dances and impure songs, which are in honour of idols." Whence it is easy for us to infer, that this holy doctor does not absolutely condemn dancing, singing,

operas and comedies, but only those shows that represented fables after the lascivious manner of the Greeks and Romans, and which were celebrated in honour of Idols. This is likewise St. Bonaventure's opinion, who says expressly, "That shows are good and lawful, if they are attended with necessary precautions and circumstances." His master, the great Albertus, taught him this doctrine: and the words which I met with upon this subject in St. Antonius, Archbishop of Florence, are so pertinent that I cannot forbear inserting them here. "The profession of a comedian, because it is useful for the diversion of men, which is requisite, is not forbidden in its own nature: from whence it follows, that it is no less lawful to get one's livelihood by this art, &c." And in another place he says, "Comedy is a mixture of pleasant speeches and actions, for the diversion of a man's self, or for that of another. If nothing is mixed in it either unbecoming or an affront to God, or prejudicial to one's neighbour, it is an effect of that virtue which is called *Eutrapelia*; for the mind which is fatigued by internal cares, as the body is by external labour, has as much need of repose as the body has of nourishment. This repose is procured by those kind of diverting speeches and actions which are called plays." Can any thing, Sir, be said of greater weight in favour of comedy? Yet he who says it, is a man of undoubted sanctity. How comes it to pass that

he does not declaim against it, as the ancients did? It is because the *drama* grows more correct and perfect every day; AND I HAVE OBSERVED, IN READING THE HOLY FATHERS, THAT THE NEARER THEY COME TO OUR TIMES, THE MORE FAVOURABLE THEY ARE TO PLAYS, BECAUSE THE STAGE WAS NOT SO LICENTIOUS AS BEFORE*. Thus likewise we see, that it is not prohibited by the saint of our times; the great Francis de Sales, who might, without dispute, serve as a pattern to all directors.—And *Fontana de Ferrara*, in his “Institutes,” relates that the pious saint, *Charles Borromeus*, allowed stage-plays in his diocess by an order in the year 1583, yet upon condition that before they were acted they should be revised and licensed by his grand Vicar, for fear any thing which is immodest should be in them. This pious and learned cardinal did then allow of modest comedies, and condemned only the immodest and profane, as appears by the third council which he held at Milan, in the year 1572.

Independent of this multitude of testimonies, which are in my favour, I might likewise form a strong proof taken from the words and practice of

* I wish our modern correctors would be at the trouble of consulting ALL the fathers;—but I presume they stop at the very period when the others become liberal.

the holy Father's in general, and observe that those who have cried out so loudly against the stage, have been as violent in declaiming against playing at cards, dice, &c. They have inveighed against banquets and feasts, against luxury and gaudy dresses, lofty buildings, magnificent houses, rich furniture, rare painting, &c. &c.* St. Chrysostom has whole homilies upon this subject: we find a particular catalogue of them in the *Pedagogue* of St. Clement Alexandrinus. St. Augustin treats very largely of them in most of his works, and

* The plausible declamations of some of the evangelical party, against the expence of a theatrical establishment, are truly ridiculous. Some will exclaim against the money appropriated to that use, affirming that it would be better applied if granted to a charitable institution. Others dwell upon the absurdity of gratifying imaginary pleasures, when real enjoyment could be so well purchased by furnishing Bibles and Missionaries for OUR MODERN CRUSADES. Yet I have known several of those liberal, considerate gentlemen, contentedly enjoying from five hundred to two thousand a year. And what is very extraordinary, not one of them seemed to think his income more than sufficient for his own immediate wants. I believe it to be a rare instance, their refusing another living, or an estate, upon the plea that the one they possessed was more than sufficient to satisfy the real demands of nature.

Let all the rich shake off the superflux of wealth, for the relief of the mendicant, and who would not be a beggar?

R. M.

particularly in his letter to *Possidonius*. St. Cyprian quoted both by St. Augustin, St. Gregory, —in short all the fathers have warmly declaimed against the luxury and richness of apparel; sometimes exciting us to follow the example of St. John the Baptist, who, for the austerity of his life, was so highly commended by our Saviour. And yet we find that they did not raise so many doubts of conscience in men's minds upon this score, as they did upon the account of stage-plays; and none made a scruple either of wearing habits suitable to their quality, nor of living at ease, provided they did it within the compass of modesty and moderation. Why then should we not extend this indulgence to the drama, and affirm, that the reproaches of the doctors of the church are applicable to luxury, intemperance and prodigality, but not to the innocent and moderate use of the good things of this life. So we may interpret their words of immoral and profane plays, but not of those that do not transgress the rules of prudence and morality.

“To prove,” says *Albertus Magnus*, “that
 “the scripture does not condemn plays, dancing
 “and shows, considered singly, and without those
 “offensive circumstances which make them con-
 “demnable, do not we read in Exodus, *That*
 “*Miriam the Prophetess, the sister of Aaron,*
 “*took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went*

“out after her with timbrels and with dancing?
 “Ex. 15, 20. Does not the Royal Prophet (Psal.
 “68, 25—27) say *That Benjamin was among*
 “*the damsels who played with timbrels?*—Nay,
 “does not God himself, by the mouth of Jeremiah,
 “Chap. 31, v. 4, promise the Jews, that upon
 “their return from Chaldee, they should play upon
 “timbrels, and go forth in the dances of them that
 “make merry? * Therefore dances and pleasures
 “are not in themselves sinful, or unlawful, but
 “made so by the criminal circumstances added to
 “them: and I would not enjoin a penitent to
 “abstain from them, since God himself not only
 “permits, but promises them.” And indeed,
 take away the excess which may possibly creep
 into dramatic representations, and I know no harm
 in them: for it is a kind of speaking picture,
 wherein are represented histories or fables, for the
 diversion, and very often for the instruction of
 men.

* To these instances might have been added, the parable
 of “THE PRODIGAL SON.” *And they began to be MERRY.*
Now his elder son was in the fields, and as he came and drew
nigh to the house, he heard MUSIC and DANCING. Luke 15.
 v. 24—25.

This little DRAMA, delivered by our blessed Saviour,
 evidently proves HE did not object to mirth and music.

R. M.

Hitherto we find nothing amiss in the design of the stage; but perhaps its enemies will object, that it must needs be bad, however, because it is prohibited. I protest, Sir, I never yet thought the prohibition of any thing made it sinful, but on the contrary, the viciousness of it made it to be prohibited. But let us consult those places of scripture which seem to forbid plays, and such like exhibitions, and try to explain them, not as we please, but by the words of the greatest Doctors.

Albertus Magnus, who has collected all those passages, shall give us the explanation of them. The first which he mentions is that of St. Paul, who seems to reduce all those sports to immodesty; for the Apostle, exhorting men to avoid that sin, expresses himself thus, 1. Cor. 10. as some of them fell into impurity, of whom it is written, *The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.**

The second is taken out of *Exonust*, Chap. 32, where we find that dances were first invented before idols; and by this they prove that it is an idolatrous institution, to excite men to impurity. The third is that of *ISAIAH*, Chap. 3. who in the name of God denounces great threatenings against those

* Vide p. 8, 9.

† Vide p. 82.

kind of sports : *Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk forth with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and tripping as they go and making a tinkling with their feet; therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, &c.* And lastly, it is pretended that St. PAUL includes all public sights in those famous words (I. THESS. 5, 22,) *Abstain from all appearance of evil.* But Albertus Magnus, to all those passages, thus replies. “ That
 “ dancing, &c. though not in their own nature evil,
 “ may become so by being attended with those
 “ unhappy circumstances which St. PAUL is to be
 “ understood to speak of.—That it is false to assert
 “ that the Jews never danced but before idols. It
 “ has been done upon other occasions; witness
 “ *Miriam* the sister of *Moses* and *Aaron*, whom we
 “ formerly mentioned. God reproves by the
 “ mouth of his prophet, only those impudent
 “ gestures with which the dances of the Jews were
 “ sometimes attended. And lastly, That St. Paul
 “ forbids the *appearance of REAL evil*, and not of
 “ that which may become so by accident and
 “ untoward circumstances.”

But you will say, if plays are good in themselves, why are the actors of them noted with infamy in *Justinian's* “INSTITUTES”? Pray let me ask you a question or two.—Does that soldier sin who runs away in battle for fear of being killed? or does

a young widow, who cannot live single, commit a mortal sin by marrying a second husband before her year is up? Yet the same book brands both of them with infamy, and a thousand other persons whose actions are not criminal. It is therefore a very weak consequence to prove the sinfulness of an action because it is noted as infamous. Suppose it true that the players become infamous by acting on the stage, I would fain know why the youth of the universities, and other persons, very prudent, and sometimes of the best quality, who, for their own diversion, and without scandal, act parts in a play, are not as infamous as the common players? * I hope none will say, it is because the latter act to get by it, whereas the others do it for diversion, for that is a very wretched argument.

Suppose any action to be evil in itself, what signifies whether a man gets by it or not? It will still be evil, and no circumstance can alter its nature.—For as a perjured man, or a calumniator,

* We must bear in remembrance that Father Caffaro lived and wrote in France, where the profession of an actor was considered so offensive, as even to deprive him of the rites of christian burial. Under our happy government and tolerant ecclesiastical establishment, we know no such absurd, degrading, invidious distinctions.—If indeed a *certain sect* was paramount, the players would then be persecuted while living, and when dead, their “monuments would be the maws of Kites.”

branded with infamy by the law, will be always infamous, let them be in what circumstances soever, so plays cannot be represented upon any occasion or motive whatever, without incurring the stain of infamy which you say is cast upon it, But to understand the meaning of the laws, it is requisite to have recourse to those Doctors who have expounded them. Pray see what the famous *Baldus* says on this subject, "The players who act in a modest way, either to divert themselves or please others, and who commit nothing against good-manners, are not to be reputed infamous." You perceive then, according to this commentator, that the infamy falls only on those who act infamous plays.

Since time changes every thing, rational men will judge the subject as *it is*, not as *it was*. Were not the physicians turned out of Rome as infamous persons? * And in the esteem they are now held, is there the least mark of their infamy left? Why then should any reflection remain to stigmatize a laudable and ingenious profession, which in France (and perhaps elsewhere) is become rather the school of virtue than that of vice? The reason why players formerly were declared infamous, was from the infamy so predominant in the plays which they

* Vide "FREE THOUGHTS."

acted, and the infamy which they themselves added to it by their dissolute lives. And now, since that cause is removed, its consequences indubitably should be abolished. If any consequences are to be drawn from this happy change, it is that plays being altogether unblameable, those who act them, provided they live honestly, should not be reckoned among the number of dishonourable persons. This is so far true, that the being a player does not degrade any man's quality. FLORIDOR, who is said to have been the greatest player France ever had, being a gentleman by birth, was not judged unworthy of that title upon the account of his profession. When inquiry was made about the false noblesse, he was admitted by the king and council to make out the truth of his, which, by right of inheritance, descended to his posterity. THOSE of the OPERA, if born gentlemen, are not (by the institutes granted to that musical accademy) to lose their quality. Now, are there prerogatives for the one which are not to be allowed to the other? And if there be any distinction between them, have not all ages determined it in favour of comedy, since by the consent of all nations, poetry is the elder sister of music?

You say, several Doctors (or at least such as pretend to be so) have shewn you certain rituals which forbid the confessors to administer the sacraments to players, which they confirm by the

authority of several councils. To this I answer, that those rituals, and the canons of those councils, only mean it of such players who act scandalous pieces, or who act themselves immodestly. But let those people tell you what difference they make between stage-plays and other kind of sports; for as to the rituals, the canons, the councils, &c. they make none, but equally prohibit them all. Yet your Doctors, who talk so loudly of the fathers and the councils, do not scrupulously follow their decisions against gaming and other sports. We find that abbots, priests, bishops and ecclesiastics make no difficulty of playing, and pretend that all the censures of the Fathers ought to be understood of the EXCESS in sports, and not of those which are moderate, and used without much application, to pass away a little time. Why then should not the same thing be urged, and the same indulgence allowed in behalf of plays, since we find such a dispensation with respect to other sports? Besides should you ask the bishops and prelates what they think of plays, they would declare, that when they are modest, and have nothing in them which wounds morality and christianity, they do not pretend to censure them. And even if they were silent in the case, one may guess at their opinion by their conduct, since in those very diocesses where those severe rituals are used, plays are acted, tolerated, and perhaps approved. If they are bad, why are they tolerated? As they are acted at Paris,

I see no fault in them. It is true, I cannot pass a definitive judgment upon them, since I never go to see them: but there are three very easy modes of knowing what is done at the theatres; and I acknowledge that I have made use of all three. The first is, to inform one self of it by men of sense and probity, who, out of that horror they have to sin, would not allow themselves to be present at those exhibitions, if sinful. The next is, to judge, by the confessions of those who go thither, of the evil effects which plays produce upon their minds. The third is, the reading of the plays:— And I protest, by these ways I have not been able to discover the least appearance of the excess which the Fathers with so much justice condemned in plays. Numerous persons of eminent virtue, and of a very nice, not to say scrupulous conscience, have been forced to own to me, that the plays on the French theatre are at present so pure, that there is nothing in them which can offend the chastest ear.

Every day at court, the bishops, cardinals, and nuncios of the pope make no scruple to be present at them; and it would be no less impudence than folly, to conclude that all those great prelates are profane libertines, since they authorise the crime by their presence. It is rather a proof that the plays are so pure and regular, that none need be ashamed or afraid to see them. I have likewise

sometimes made a reflection; (which to me seems of some weight) on seeing the bills posted up at the corners of the streets, announcing plays acted by the King's authority, and by his Majesty's servants. I naturally conceived, if they invited people to some bad action, or to infamous places, &c. the magistrates would be so far from allowing the publication of those bills, as to punish severely those who had the temerity to abuse the king's authority, by inviting his subjects to the commission of such enormities. From which I draw the conclusion, that plays are not vicious, since the magistrates do not put them down, nor the prelates make any opposition to them; and they are acted by the privilege of a religious prince, who would not by his presence authorise a crime, of which he would be more guilty than others.

As to confessions*, I could never by their means

* The CONFESSIONS of "The Methodists" not being auricular, but publicly delivered at their band-meetings and love-feasts, they have a fairer opportunity of exposing this destructive influence attributed to the stage.—Yet I have never met, in the whole course of my methodistical reading, any instance of the ruin of the soul being laid to the charge of the theatre only, but merely as an adjunct in the vain pomps and glories of the world.

The "Methodist Magazine" will furnish us with many proofs that the love of the drama is one of the most

find out this pretended mischief of plays; for if it were the source of so many crimes, it would from thence follow that the rich, who frequent the theatres, would be the greatest sinners:—and yet we find that the poor who never saw a play, are as guilty as the rich of anger, revenge, uncleanness and pride. I would therefore rather conclude, and that with some reason too, that those sins are the effects of human weakness or malice, which take an occasion of sinning from all manner of objects indifferently.

As to the reading of the plays which are now acted in France, I never could find, in those I have perused, any thing which could in the most distant manner offend christianity or good-manners. The greatest fault that could be found with them is, that most of the subjects are taken out of fables; and yet what harm is there in that? “They are such fables out of which may be taken very fine instructions of morality, capable of inspiring men with a love of virtue, and a detestation of vice.” These are the words of a very great man (*Peter, Bishop of Blois*) who maintains, “that it is

difficult things to eradicate from the minds of several of their new proselytes.—And I have often sighed, when I have viewed in imagination, the last expiring spark of genius, absorbed in the chilling gloom of contracted ignorance.

R. M.

“lawful to extract truths out of heathen fables,
 “and that it is no more than receiving arms from
 our very enemies.”

To leave nothing unresolved, let us examine the precautions which the doctors give us, in going to a play. As to the lawfulness of the Drama, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, St. Antonine, and above all Albertus Magnus has said, that in all sports we should take care of three things. The first is, that we should not seek for pleasure in immodest words or actions, as they did in the times of the ancients, an unhappy custom which Cicero laments in these words: “There is a kind of jesting which is
 “sordid, insolent, wicked and obscene.” The second thing we are to take care of, says Albertus, is, that when we would refresh our spirits, we should not entirely lose the gravity of the soul, which gives St. Ambrose occasion to say, “Let us beware, lest in giving our spirits some relaxation, we
 “lose the harmony of our souls, where the virtues
 “form an agreeable concert.” And the third condition required in our sports, as well as in all the other actions of our lives, is, that they be suitable to the person, time, and place, and regulated by all the other circumstances which may render them inoffensive. It would be easy for me to prove that none of these qualifications are wanting to the plays, as they are in France; from whence you ought to conclude, that they are good and allowable.

After all I have said for plays, you cannot question but they should be such as are free from all immodest speeches and actions. You have told me yourself, that the players are very careful in this point, and that they would not so much as suffer, when they accept of any piece, that it should have any thing in it indecent, licentious, equivocal, or the least word under which any poison might be concealed.

We have very severe laws in France against blasphemers, they are bored through the tongue, they are condemned even to be burned; and should we caress the players, or give them any privilege if they were blasphemers, libertines, or profligates?

“We own,” say our Reformers, “that they dare not openly speak any thing that is profane, nor act upon the stage those infamies which were formerly acted there, but there is still something remaining of its primitive corruption, disguised under gay names. Is there any play acted now, where there is not some love-intrigue or other? Where the passions are not represented in all their light? Where mention is not made of ambition, jealousy, revenge and hatred.—A dangerous school for youth, where they are easily disposed to raise real passions in their hearts, by seeing feigned ones represented!—The first duty of a christian is to suppress his

“passions, and not to expose himself to the growth
 “of them: and by a necessary consequence,
 “nothing is more pernicious than that which is
 “capable of exciting them.”

A fine speech this for a rigid declaimer, but not sound enough for an equitable divine! Is there no difference, think you, (between an action or a word which may by accident raise the passions, and those which do it in reality?

The last are absolutely unlawful and sinful, and though it might happen that a man might be unmoved by them; yet we are obliged to avoid them, because it is only by chance that they produce not their effect, whereas in their own nature they are always attended with pernicious consequences. But for those words and actions which may by accident raise the passions, we cannot justly condemn them, and we must even fly to deserts to avoid them, for we cannot walk a step, read a book, enter a church, or live in the world, without meeting with a thousand things capable of exciting the passions. Must a woman because she is handsome never go to church, for fear of exciting the desires of the debauchee? Must the great in courts, and the magistrates lay aside that splendour which is becoming, and perhaps necessary to them, for fear of exciting ambition and a desire of riches in others? Must a man never wear a sword for

fear of being guilty of murder? This would be ridiculous! Under those circumstances, if by misfortune a scandal happens, and an occasion of sin be taken, it is a *passive*, not an *active* scandal,—pardon those school terms.—It is an occasion *taken*, not *given*, which kind alone we are ordered to avoid, for as to the first it is impossible to avoid it, and sometimes to foresee it.

All histories (NOT EXCEPTING THE BIBLE) make use of such words as express the passions, and relate great actions, of which they have been the cause. And will it be a crime to read history, because we may there meet with something which may be an occasion of our falling?—By no means, unless it be a scandalous, profane, and loose history, such a one as will infallibly stir up dangerous passions, and then it is no longer an occasion *taken* but *given*. But this is not the character of our plays, for though they speak of love, hatred, ambition and revenge, it is not done with an intention of exciting those passions in the audience*,

* Here is another proof that the stage adversaries have never shifted their ground; they still proceed in the same monstrous mode of attack; they will *now* imperiously demand—"Is there a leading hero in a play which any christian should consider as a model to be observed, or an example to be followed?" Ridiculous! Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard, Lear, and Romeo are not intended by

nor are there any such scandalous circumstances in them, as will infallibly produce such mischievous effects in their minds. Besides, as the wise Lycurgus said, "Shall we destroy all the vines, "because some men get drunk with the juice of the grape?" An ill use has and may be made of the most sacred things, such as the holy scriptures, and consequently of the most indifferent and least serious: yet neither the one nor the other ought to be forbidden, unless we would forbid every thing that may be put to an ill use.

As to the second qualification which our casuists require in sports, which is to avoid breaking

the poet as examples to *follow*, but beacons to *warn* against jealousy, melancholy, revenge, ambition, cruelty, cunning, paternal injustice, and filial disobedience.—The heroes are all punished for their various derelictions from virtue—but not one becomes an object for imitation. We may even sympathise with Othello, weep with Hamlet, admire the martial firmness of Macbeth, the courage and address of Richard; lament the madness of Lear, and regret the fate of Romeo, without a wish to imitate any one of the characters. We find the dramatist expressly telling us the fatal consequences attendant upon jealousy, ambition, cruelty, revenge, injustice, and even love itself, if carried beyond the bounds of duty. To prevent any possibility of mistaking his moral, he punishes them all with death. Now none but a madman would imitate a character under such a severe penalty.

R. M.

the harmony of the soul by the excess and length of our pleasures; it may be said that neither those who compose them, nor those who act them, so far unbend their minds as to destroy that just disposition of soul. As for the first, they have liberty to go or stay away; and after a days labour, two hours of refreshment may be allowed. As for the authors and players, whose profession *seems* to be one continued diversion, they do not certainly look upon their lives to be a play, since they have other serious business, in providing for and supporting their families, besides the common duties of christians to perform.

As for the circumstance of time, of which our casuists would have us take care, it is observed in France, where they never act but at proper hours. One of the things against which the Fathers declaimed the most, was the time of acting the plays; they lasted the whole day, and people had scarce any time to go to church. Thus St. Chrysostom complains: "That the christians in his time, and in his diocess, did not only go to plays, but were so intent upon them that they staid whole days at those infamous sights, without going one moment to church." St. John, of Damascus, condemned the same excess in these words, "There are several towns where the inhabitants are from morning to night feasting their eyes with all manner of sights, and in hearing

“ always immodest songs, which cannot chuse but
 “ raise in their minds wicked desires.”

Is there any thing like this to be found in our plays? They begin at five or six o'clock when divine service is over, the prayers and sermon ended; when the church doors are shut, and people have had time enough to bestow on business and devotion,—and they end about eight or nine. As for the circumstance of places, it is observed in France;—formerly they acted in churches, but now they have public theatres for the purpose.

The circumstance of the persons is also observed, for those who act are civil people, who have undertaken the employ, and generally behave themselves in it with decency; at least there are as few ill men among them as in other professions: their vices arise from their own corrupt nature, and not from the state or calling they are in, since all men are like them. I have conversed, and am PARTICULARLY ACQUAINTED WITH SOME OF THEM, WHO, OUT OF THE THEATRE, AND IN THEIR OWN FAMILIES, LIVE THE MOST EXEMPLARY LIFE IN THE WORLD*. You have told

* How Doctors differ! a Doctor Witherspoon in a letter upon *Play-Actors*, says—“ For my own part, I would no more hold communication with a master of the Circus than a manager of the Theatre. And I should be sorry

me yourself, that all of them in general, out of their common stock, contribute a considerable sum to pious and charitable uses, of which the magistrates and superiors of the convents could give sufficient testimony. I question whether we can say as much of those zealous persons who inveigh so loudly against them.

I am conscious, Sir, that some people will blame me for having followed the most favourable opinion concerning plays, for it is now the fashion to teach an austere doctrine, and not to practice it, but I assure you, I have been solely governed by truth, wishing still to observe that Father's rule who directs us to form our actions by the most severe opinions, and our doctrine by the most indulgent.

I am,
Sir,
Yours, &c.

“to be thought to have any intimacy with either the one or the other.”—But the sagacious Doctor has contrived to bring in Lord Chesterfield, as a party joining in the condemnation of Opera performers and musicians!—How?—or why?—Because he tells his son “that to be always fiddling and playing, is not consistent with the character of a gentleman.”

O Witherspoon! Withersoon! sapient Witherspoon!
living or dead, Hail to thee, Witherspoon!! R. M.

FREE THOUGHTS

UPON

*Methodists, Actors, and the Influence
of the Stage.*

 ADVERTISEMENT.

I MUST openly and candidly inform my readers, that they will occasionally find in the subsequent pages expressions which policy cannot warrant, nor prudence justify. But “ I am whipped and scourged with rods, nettled and stung with pismires, when I think of the many provocations we have received from some certain TOLERATED INTOLERANTS.”

Several of my friends, who honoured my manuscript with a perusal, suggested to me the impropriety of approaching, if not entering, the province of abuse, at the very moment I am condemning my opponents for their frequent excursions to the same disgraceful resource*. I daringly mention this to shew, that if I am erring, it is wilfully, and I shall probably add to

* Vide Introductory Letter, page 9.

the offence, by not only avowing my knowledge of it, but by openly justifying the measure. The arrears of two centuries*, from a long unsettled account, which I much regret some of my predecessors did not balance at former periods, and thus have added another instance in favour of the good old adage. "that short reckoning makes long friends." However, since the office of accomptant-general, has fallen to my lot, it is my wish to re-pay our accusers and abusers, partly in their own coin. I confess myself incompetent to the task of making up the whole sum, but whatever deficiency there may be found on this score, I trust will be more than compensated for by an overplus of reason, candour, and justice.

I have been conscientious in striking the balance, and, *by the soul of Cocker*, I believe every item advanced in my statement to be strictly correct.

In this wordy war, let it be clearly understood, that I do not consider myself as the aggressor, on the contrary, my profession is daily—hourly annoyed by an enemy armed like wild Indians, with poisoned darts, tomahawks, and KIMES†!—What weapon can

* Vide Introductory Letter, page 9.

† Vide Edinburgh Review, April, 1809, page 46.

I wield against such adversaries?—The sharpened instruments of wit, satire, and ridicule, have been frequently exercised in vain against the desultory attacks of these *demi* maniacs. The weapons must have been ill directed, they must have been pointed at their heads or their hearts, the former of which is impenetrable, and the latter invulnerable. However, could I even guide them with more effect, such polished arms I cannot boast; a good homely cudgel is the most respectable epithet I can venture to bestow upon “Free Thoughts,” but I trust it will be found of sufficient powers to turn the edge of their “KIMES,” ere they can totally destroy its action.

FREE THOUGHTS, &c.

IT is a matter of astonishment in this age of novelty-hunting, when we have been informed that virtues are vices, and have pursued vices as if they were virtues :—when emancipation, reform, freedom and equality are the watch-words of the day.—It is somewhat extraordinary no one has started for the honour of elevating **THE STAGE** to its proper level, and disencumbering the professors from the fetters forged for them in the dark days of ignorance and superstition.

The Pagan African found advocates amongst all ranks, all persuasions; even in the most rigid of our sectaries, who maugre selfishness, apathy, contempt of fine feelings, and detestation of poetical embellishments, extended their sympathy over the bosom of the Atlantic, exaggerated the sufferings of their client, by fancifully decorating the unenlightened savage with refined sensations, delicacy of feeling, and mental aggravations, such as the highest polish of society alone can give. Yet those very people would ridicule the idea of a

sensitive mind, in their own country, lacerated and writhing under the scourge of pride, exercised by the hand of prejudice.

If they were to draw a comparison between the sable slave and the itinerant player, it would be considerably to the disadvantage of the latter; for they would coolly calculate upon manual labour on the one side, and (what they would deem) trifling pursuits on the other.

When I say no one has endeavoured to raise THE STAGE to its just elevation, I do not mean to assert that it is without its supporters, or champions, No—I have no doubt that their numbers would equal that of its assailants:—but I must add, they too servilely follow the steps of each other. Echo follows echo, in dull monotonous line.—Opinions of councils and senates; fathers of the church and heathen philosophers, are all set forth in battle array, one against the other, authority against authority, and the suffrages of the dead are called for, to decide a question essential only to the living. The stage accusers bray forth the evil tendency of “The Beggars Opera,” the idle story of *Doctor Faustus*, and a hundred other groundless absurdities. The stage defender hurls back the powerful conversion worked by the tragedy of *George Barnwell*; the discovery of a murder by the acting of a piece called “Friar Francis,” and many other puerilities.

The only difference I have been able to perceive between the two parties, is this——That bigotry generally sides with the enemies to the stage; consequently there is there a greater degree of ignorance, a larger portion of absurdity, and joined with an ardent, rancorous zeal to effect the object. Its supporters, being mostly men of a liberal turn of mind, enter upon the subject calmly, armed with no other weapons than antiquated authorities, and not wielding them with a proportioned enthusiasm to *the malignants*, their defence seems at best but lukewarm. Neither party is disposed to quit the old, worn-out system of warfare, and by more extensive excursions, arrive at victory or defeat!—Few seem to have thought for themselves upon the subject, but all appear cramped, and enveloped in the opinions of others. Let none imagine that I have the presumption to think myself equal to the task of emancipating my brethren from the ill effects of a prejudice of which we have all so much cause to complain; or, that I have the temerity to start for the honour of being their champion—No—but fifteen years of experience and bitter reflection on the thoughtless cruelty of society, have compelled me to obtrude myself upon the public, with the hopes of stimulating genius and philanthropy to second my endeavours, by supporting, fostering, vindicating and encouraging a liberal, though injured profession.

The profession which produced and nourished the genius of a Shakespeare!—Shall it be attacked by ignorance, illiberality, and calumny, and be in want of shields, to ward off the poisonous, mis-directed shafts of such contemptible adversaries. The profession, which has been adorned by the aid of the immortal Shakespeare, the divine Milton, the christian Addison, the pious Young, and the moral Johnson!—Shall it be overpowered by retired monks, enthusiastic visionaries, unlettered bigots, and brainless sectaries?—Oh no!—Depress it they may!—Destroy it!—Impotent attempt!—The viper and the file, snow balls against adamant, phosphoric lights to extinguish the meridian sun beam, can alone typify the absurdity!—I have no apprehension about its extinction, I would only deprecate the unmerited censure heaped upon those, who embrace its pursuits. To expose the fallacy of that censure, I lay myself open to the sneer of unfeeling ignorance, the contemptuous smile of cold-hearted apathy, the base attacks of malevolence in its worst shape. All this, I shrink not from; but, when I take into the account, the ordeal of criticism.—I own myself a coward—I suspect my powers—and am more than half inclined to resign the daring bold attempt. However, as I have not taken up my pen with the ridiculous vanity of anticipating either fame or profit*,

* The late *learned* soi-desant prophet Huntingdon says —“ God enabled me to put out several little books, which

as I am prompted by a heart-felt conviction of being an injured party; and, as I am well satisfied with the rectitude of my intentions, shall I desist because my style may want grace, my language polish, or my composition elegance? Truth, integrity, and honour shall be their substitutes. With these, for my support, and the patient indulgence of the liberal for my protection, I shall venture to proceed, having first premised, that it is for a WELL REGULATED STAGE, I would wish to be consider the pleader.

In reply to those, who so triumphantly produce, and sound forth the wisdom of some ancient authors, who have written against the use of the stage; their mode of attack appears at once so puerile, disingenuous, and unjust, that they are scarcely deserving of notice; they prove nothing but a lamentable dearth of genius in themselves, by continually doleing out meagre opinions of

“ were almost universally *exclaimed* against both by
 “ *preachers* and *professors*, and by these means God sent
 “ them into all WINDS, so that I soon rubbed off one
 “ hundred, and soon after another, so that in a short time
 “ I had reduced my thousand pounds (debt) down to seven
 “ hundred.”—Alas! I know MY little book will be *exclaimed*
 against by *preachers* and *professors*! Would I could
 flatter either my creditors or myself with the idea, that it
 would be sent into ALL winds, or any wind, or raise the
 wind at all.

centuries, long since past. I am not satisfied with accusing them of dullness only; they are to be charged with a want of literary integrity, for they frequently give their extracts from the page of antiquity, mutilated, vamped, or tortured to answer their own particular purpose. I conceive all those authorities inadmissible at the present period. The opinions quoted were delivered according to the then existing circumstances, such as the state of the stage, the complexion of the times, the peculiar manner of thinking in the writers, and intended as a corrective to the then existing improprieties, or more properly speaking, enormities of the thing condemned. But I never understood the frail opinion of man, upon a speculative point, was to be considered as definitive, universal, and eternal. The Greeks and Romans had many odious abominable customs; such as, I presume none would have the temerity to defend. Their gladiators and wild beasts, their inculcation and support of suicide, their insatiate love of conquest, tyranny, and dominion! Nay, even vices, which modesty and decency will scarcely permit me to hint at. Yet all those things were openly practised and supported. But why retain with such tenacity *one* only of their prejudices, and reject all the rest*?

* By the way, this will apply in one instance to "THE FATHERS," who have expressed as strong an aversion to singing and dancing as they have to the use of the drama.

Admit they had an objection to the existence of the drama, which, however, is very far from being

Yet I know several of THE SERIOUS who will go to an assembly, and even to the OPERA HOUSE and have their children instructed in dancing and music, and yet remain determinedly hostile to the existence of a theatre. But, indeed, Methodism, in every shape, is so contradictory, that there is no mode of confining it. We have even music masters and dancing masters METHODISTS! Organists of churches METHODISTS! How they can reconcile these seeming opposites is a secret beyond my comprehension.

But that these PIE BALD sectaries may not imagine the stage the only thing that has come within the scope of ecclesiastical resentment, I will furnish them with an extract from "An essay on the history of dancing," published in the year 1712. The author gives it as a quotation from the history of "The Waldensis and Albigenses, part 3.—book 2.—c. ix. p. 63. "A dance is the devil's procession, and he that entereth into a dance, entereth into his possession. The devil is the guide, the middle and end of the dance. As many paces as a man maketh in dancing, so many paces doth he make to Hell. A man sinneth in dancing divers ways; as in his pace, his touch, &c. &c." "For the devil hath not only one sword in the dance, but as many as there are beautiful and well-adorned persons in the dance. For the words of a woman are a glittering sword. And therefore that place is much to be feared wherein the enemy hath so many swords, since that one only sword of his may be feared. Again, the devil in this place strikes with a sharpened sword; for the women come not willingly to the dance, if they be not painted and adorned; the which painting and ornament is as a grind-

the real fact; yet, allow it, still this was not the only profession they attacked. Physic and oratory have occasionally participated in their censure, and become the objects of their antipathy. Pliny informs us, that the science of physic was so repugnant to the general sense of mankind, that there was scarcely a kingdom of any consequence in the world, but rejected it with the greatest aversion.

Hippocrates, one of those exalted genius's formed to conquer difficulties, and dissipate prejudices, was fortunate enough, after many struggles, to make the establishment of this noble science palatable. He reduced it from his own experience to rules, he composed tables, and they were suspended in the Ephesian temple of Diana. Its

stone, upon which the devil sharpeneth his sword. They that deck and adorn their daughters, are like those who put dry wood to the fire, to the end it may burn the better." "Dancing is the pomp of the devil, and he that danceth maintaineth his pomp, and singeth his mass. For the woman that singeth in the dance, is the prioress of the devil, and those that answer are clerks, and the beholders are the parishioners, and the music are the bells, and the fiddlers the ministers of the devil."

History of Dancing, page 47.

There are as many ancient authorities, and opinions of Fathers, against the use of dancing and singing, (hymns excepted) as there are against representing or witnessing the performance of a play.

success terminated a very short period after his decease. Notwithstanding his having left a number of disciples, and the probable benefit derived from their practice, all could not deter the Athenian Senate from forbidding the study of physic, and banishing the professors out of Greece.

About two centuries after this event, Chrysippus was an eminent physician with the Argians, by publishing opinions in opposition to the rules of Hippocrates, he gave rise to a violent wordy war, which like many *modern* literary battles, terminated in animosity, perpetual contention, and invincible hatred. The Grecian legislature interfered and suppressed the profession, with the declaration, "that honour and life ought never to become matter of dispute." One hundred years elapsed when the art of healing was graced with another ornament in the person of Aristrato, a nephew to Aristotle. As far as royal favour could extend, he seems to stand preeminently distinguished, having received as a fee from Antiochus the first, a Prince's daughter, a thousand talents in silver, and a cup of gold! Still, the prejudice against the science was unextinguished, the skill of Aristrato did not support it beyond the lives of the few disciples he left; again, it was to feel a temporary depression, and the Senate once more forbade the reading and practice of physic. The next was Erperices, who gave the Sicilians a transient glimpse of the art,

and some short period after him, we hear of Herophilus being an eminent physician in Rhodes. A few years after his decease, this exalted science, as if disgusted with the ingratitude and obstinacy of man, withdrew its cheering influence for the long extended space of full eight hundred years!!! During this incredibly lengthened period, the practice of a physician was interdicted through the whole of Europe and Asia!!!

Asclepiades, under Providence, revived the art in the Island of Lesbos. Not to trace it through all its heavy depressions, and transient elevations, I will only give a few instances more, and dismiss the subject.—Antonius Musa, a Grecian physician, practising in Rome, in the days of the second Cæsar, will furnish us with at once a striking proof of the state of medicine at that period, and the ignorance and cruelty of this great nation, so often called upon to instruct us *poor barbarians!* Antonius had the good fortune of receiving the honour of a statue, for performing a cure upon Augustus, and he had the noble return of being stoned to death, for exercising one of the most essential and useful branches of surgery—amputation!!! Not content with this *enlightened* punishment, for having performed a laudable act, they came to a resolution (in the Senate) never to admit physicians again in Rome, which determination was kept inviolable, until the return of Nero, from Greece, “when,” says

Pliny, "he brought physicians and vices *enough* with him." Titus banished both orators and physicians, and gave (as an excuse for his conduct) the whimsical reason, that the one were destroyers of good customs, and the others *enemies of health!* Adding, "I banish physicians to prevent *vice*, for it "is well known where they reside, for the most part "part the people are very wicked." Cato Uticensis, in one of his letters from Greece to his son Marcellus, says, "Physic is like to prove most dangerous to "our common-wealth; for the people here have "long since resolved to *murder* those by *potion* "they cannot *conquer* by *arms*. I every day "observe these doctors quarrelling among them- "selves, not how they shall cure, but how they "shall kill their patients; but I enjoin you, son "Marcellus, immediately to advice the senate of "the arrival of the physicians lately sent from "hence, that they may not be suffered to read or "practice their pernicious mysteries among you." Is there a being in existence absurd enough to apply any of these semi-barbarian opinions to the present state of oratory and physic?—Or are these the judges who are to direct, with an imperious fiat, our improved, and far more refined intellectual taste?—Away with them to the sacred shades of silence and retirement*!—Like the books

* Let it not be understood, that I apply this to the WORKS of the GREAT MASTERS.—No—these in spite of

of enchantment in the land of romance, they are applied to by the learned wizard only to raise phantoms, create mischief, and scatter confusion! Not that I dread encountering the decisions of the authorities quoted against the moral exercise of a theatre. I could even bring in opposition to them some of the most exalted of the ancient writers, giving their unqualified sanction and support to the use of a stage! How nobly and how forcibly is the utility and dignity of the profession evinced by a circumstance recorded as having taken place during the triumvirate of *Pompey*, *Crassus*, and *Cæsar*. An historical fact, graced by the notice of Lord Chesterfield, in his celebrated speech upon the PLAYERS BILL. The deductions he draws from it are so much to our present purpose, that (to adorn my cause) I will give the whole quotation in his lordship's words. "During the triumvirate
 " of POMPEY, CRASSUS, and CÆSAR,—DIPHILUS,
 " an actor, revived one of the oldest plays in the
 " latin tongue, in which there happened to be the
 " following line, *Nostris, MISERIIS MAGNUS es!*
 " The whole audience immediately applied this to
 " POMPEY, (as well known by the name of

modern *vandalism*, must triumph over time, and be objects of applause and veneration, until human intellect be totally subdued. It is only the controversial subjects I would wish placed in a quiescent state, for the silent admiration of the studious and the curious.

“MAGNUS as that of POMPEY) and made the
 “performer repeat it a hundred times!—What did
 “POMPEY? Did he resent the satire, or the
 “people’s applause?—No,—his conduct was wise
 “and prudent; he reflected justly within himself,
 “that some actions he had been guilty of had
 “made him unpopular; from that hour he began
 “to alter his measures, he gained by degrees the
 “people’s esteem, grew popular again, and then
 “neither feared their wit, nor felt their satire. My
 “lords, THE STAGE, PRESERVED AND KEPT UP
 “TO ITS TRUE PURPOSE, SHOULD, NO DOUBT,
 “ONLY REPRESENT SUCH INCIDENTS IN THE
 “ACTIONS AND CHARACTERS OF MEN, AS MAY
 “TEND TO THE DISCOURAGEMENT OF VICE, AND
 “THE PROMOTING OF VIRTUE AND GOOD LIFE;
 “nor does it vary from its institution when it
 “helps us to judge of the vices and follies of the
 “times. And though the Romans, at the period
 “I have mentioned, were declining in their liberty,
 “yet it is plain they had not then lost the use of it;
 “but when the stage is under POWER and CON-
 “TROUL, such instances are not to be met with.”
 This FACT weighs down a hundred theoretic
 opinions.—Here is proof positive of a reformation
 produced in the conduct of one, upon whom
 depended the fate of thousands, if not millions! I
 could bring a cloud of ancient documents equally
 as strong.—I do not wish it—I condemn the subter-
 fuge of removing the question to such remote

grounds. The Romans could no more lay down rules for us, than we can, at the present moment, dictate laws for the people who may inhabit the banks of the Tyber, two thousand years to come. Human measures, wearing the stamp of wisdom some centuries past, would, very probably, now present the effigy of folly.

With all due deference to the Fathers in council, or out of council, I must and will question their decisions on the subject.—They could not judge of what they did not know.—Whatever existed of a theatre in their times, was immersed in barbarism, indecency, vulgarity, and impiety!

Could the extinction of a profession, *even* in that state, have compensated for the loss of a Shakespeare, and, very probably, a Milton? An idle question! Few of the opponents of a WELL REGULATED STAGE have taste, feeling, susceptibility, or genius enough, to relish the genuine beauties of either of those divine bards.

The stage objectors deal precisely in the same manner with the ecclesiastics, they do with the ancient schoolmen; it is the condemnations published against the stage, they alone avail themselves of, rejecting every other opinion which the Fathers held equally irrefragable. They punished all those who presumed to maintain an opinion of the existence

of the antipodes, or that the earth had any other form than that of a plane! Now every school boy knows we have antipodes, and that our planet is orbicular. The copernican system was anathematised, and its supporters excommunicated. At present, the copernican system is fully established; and the anathemas, and the excommunications, sleep with the Fathers. Why their rest should be disturbed upon the present subject, must ever excite in me wonder and regret.

There is an ANCIENT BOOK in existence to whose opinions I bend with profound reverence. From whose source we all affect to derive instruction, wisdom, consolation, comfort, and support. Had THAT BOOK presented any thing in opposition to my side of the question, I should not have had the temerity to proceed thus far. But in vain have officious zealots endeavoured to torture different texts to their purpose; not ONE SOLITARY SENTENCE is to be found condemning the use of THE STAGE! One of the most indefatigable labourers, in the vineyards of the gospel, whose elegance of stile can only be excelled by the value of his precepts, has borrowed a sentence in one of his epistles to the Corinthians, from the Greek dramatist Menander. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." An apothegm consistent with the purity of the moral school, it was delivered in, and worthy the enlightened apostles pen to promulgate!

That the saint was conversant with the Grecian poets we have from himself*, that he was familiarly acquainted with the customs and manners of the Greeks, his travels and his writings will prove to us; nor is it any great stretch of probability to suppose him a frequenter of the Attic theatre, and an auditor at the play he has honoured by his quotation. To corroborate this supposition I will transcribe a passage from “the History of the Bible,” published in London, 1699, giving an account of the commotion raised against Paul, at Ephesus, by the silversmiths, and others concerned in the manufactory of idols†. The rabble forced two of his companions into THE THEATRE. My history adds, “Paul would have presented himself “to the people, but is withheld by certain priests “of Asia, who having embraced the FAITH, “retained yet the names of *chief of Asia*, and

* For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of YOUR OWN POETS have said—for we are also his offspring. Acts c. xvii. v. 28.

† And the whole city was filled with confusion, and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the THEATRE.

And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the THEATRE. Acts c. xix. v. 29—31.

“PRESIDED IN THE PUBLIC GAMES, when they
“could do it with a *safe conscience**.”

I dare say, the ingenuity of the “BIBLE-MONGERS” will enable them to torture this plain paragraph to their own purpose, and they will find a saving clause *in a safe conscience*!—I draw from it a conclusion, that our very earliest christians frequented theatres! This may be objected to, as not coming within the facts recorded in the bible itself, but only the history; still it is from an abridgment of the lives of the apostles, collected from the HOLY FATHERS and other ancient ECCLESIASTICAL WRITERS! We find, at any rate, from the *scriptural text*, that Paul would have entered the theatre, had not the dissuasions of his friends and the magistrates, who were apprehensive for his safety, prevented him. His intention was, indubitably, boldly to preach his doctrine to his enemies, and avail himself of the opportunity of numbers to disseminate his principles: nor would the magnificence of the structure in which his oration would have been delivered, nor the purpose for which the building was erected, have destroyed the irresistible force of his reasoning, nor injured the elegant brevity, simplicity and perspicuity of

* The same history says, Paul remained in Ephesus three years after this tumult.

his stile. Here we find the use of A THEATRE recorded in holy writ, and not a single passage of condemnation against it! In our times, places for scenic representation are burnt to the ground, and modern saints exult with joy over the ruins of the "profane temples." St. Paul was on the point of being (perhaps) murdered in one, but he never breathes an exclamation against the institution, or its principles! These proofs are, in my opinion, more than sufficient to overwhelm all the arguments presented by all the cavillers, opposers and objectors to a theatre that ever existed. What, I would ask, are the fables, the apologues, and the parables of the ancients*? Are they not dramas? Do we not find in them the different characters speaking and acting according to their various dispositions? Are they not made up of the virtuous, the vicious, the cunning, the simple, the miser, the spendthrift, the luxurious rich, the abject poor; in short, all the degrees, conditions, vices, virtues, passions, affections, feelings, incident to human nature? They were delivered by *one* speaker, certainly, yet the formation, end and design are the same; by an agreeable, innocent fiction, to arrest the attention of the careless, and by imperceptible degrees, guide his steps towards wisdom and virtue.

* But without a parable spake he not unto them.

Mark c. iv. 34.

Would the book of Job* become less valuable if the characters of the man of Uz, his wife, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were to be recited by different speakers capable of giving effect to the importance of their several situations and dispositions? I feel a conviction it would not: and even if you could, by the auxiliary aid of music† and painted canvas, induce the heedless and thoughtless to ponder on the serious moral of a pious

* Whether this extraordinary victim to misery, suffering, and punishment, was really an inhabitant of this earth, or only created out of the poet's imagination, is a point still in suspense with the various commentators on the Bible. Many of them consider the book of Job, in the light of a *drama*; and from the superior excellence of the moral, consistency of the characters, sublimity of thought, and simplicity of stile, it evinces strong evidence of emanating from the first order of genius. Some of the interpreters and expounders of scripture, have, with a great degree of seeming probability, attributed its composition to Moses. Shrink ye not, fanatics, at the profanation—what!—the sacred law-giver a dramatist!—Be not alarmed; could we give you many such specimens of sublimity and dignity—mole-eyed and beetle-headed as ye are, the Drama must have commanded your approbation and support, and perhaps been as much an object of your idolatry as it is now of your hatred.—Ye know no medium.

† And they began to be MERRY. Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard MUSIC and DANCING.

Luke c. xv. v. 24, 25.

resignation to the dispensations of providence, you would be doing society at large a singular service. If the beverage be wholesome, never hesitate tasting, because the cup is embossed.

I have not the most distant wish for the stage to intrench upon the duties of the pulpit ; still further from my thoughts, be every intention of disrespect to the clergy. Nor would I presume to raise my profession at the expense of a body, whose sacred function entitles it to the reverence and esteem of all the virtuous. Men, who by the aid of the gospel, can give eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick, wisdom to the ignorant, comfort to the afflicted, and happiness to all. The advocates at the throne of mercy, the pleaders to divine grace, for the frailties, errors, and imperfections of their wretched fellow-creatures. But let the drama second the efforts of the pulpit, and though an humble assistant, it will be found capable of being made an active and powerful ally in the great cause of virtue.

Many blend the improprieties of the stage with the thing itself, and, because there is an exuberance, the whole must be extirpated. If the objection depended merely upon the improprieties of the stage, with pleasure would I give my feeble aid to the exposure of them, loudly would I raise my voice for the extinction of them, and gladly would I

immolate at the shrine of offended decency, every line repugnant to modesty, morality and virtue.

The stage, if left to its own bias, must ever fall in with the predominant taste of its admirers, but properly GOVERNED, it will become a *guide* instead of a *follower*, and act as a firm opposer to every improper public feeling and sentiment. The drama participates strongly in the genius it emanates from, and is supported by—POESY. It therefore loves with fervour, and hates with energy. The tender husband, the affectionate wife, the rational parent, the dutiful child, the constant lover, the mild prince, the loyal subject, the pious priest; in short, the truly good, religious, moral, and virtuous, are the objects of its warmest attachment; it decks them out in their own native beautiful colours, sounds forth their praise, and cherishes them as its most darling favourites. But, woe! woe! to their opposites!

The jealous husband, the inconstant wife, the cruel father, the abandoned son, the perjured lover, the tyrannical prince, the revolting subject, the hypocritical priest, all become loathsome, and it punishes them to the utmost extent of poetical vengeance.

It was with extreme regret I read Miss Baillie's objection to fashionable comedy, upon the plea of

its encouraging disrespect to parents, and weakening the ties of filial obedience. She says, "The moral tendency of it is very faulty; that mockery of age and domestic authority, so constantly held forth, has a very bad effect upon the younger part of an audience."—With all possible deference to Miss Baillie, I cannot but consider this objection inadmissible. Foolish, weak and wicked parents are held up to derision and contempt; and so are obstinate, perverse and wilful children. They are equally injurious to the well-being of society, and therefore fair objects for satire. Nor can I conceive the claims of the parents to exemption; on the contrary, I think they more richly merit exposure and reprobation: for the follies and aberrations of the children are, too frequently, the consequence of the vices and weaknesses of those beings who expect reverence and esteem in exchange for imbecility and vice. Affection, respect and attention to virtuous parents, can be no where more strongly enforced than on the stage: in fact, it is one of the most imperious ties implanted in the human breast: it would be, therefore, strange indeed, if the dramatic writers, of all others, would not avail themselves of a principle capable of producing effect, interest and sympathy. I scarcely remember a play where the filial and parental ties (with the above exceptions) are not placed in the most amiable point of view. If there are harsh, tyrannical, passionate, unreasonable, selfish, cruel,

parents in nature. Why should the mere honour of giving life to their oppressed offspring, shelter them from the indignation of the satirist, or protect them from the punishment due to their errors and absurdities? plays would indeed be culpable, if they were to be swayed by such incongruous partialities.

The respect for age, and the veneration for parents, so strongly inculcated and elucidated by numerous instances in the page of history, did not originate in the *mere name* of sire, or the *appearance* of silvered age; but, from the wisdom, virtue, and propriety of the seniors*.

* “ If many boys are by the original energy of nature,
 “ and the gracious discipline of providence, enabled to
 “ outgrow the futile habits of their early years; no thanks
 “ to those WICKED or FOOLISH parents, who did every thing
 “ to spoil them. Ah, ye mothers of Britain, what a mighty
 “ task is yours! Of what superlative importance to the
 “ happiness of mankind! How much have those of you to
 “ answer for, whose fantastic fondness has, from the very
 “ days in which you ought to have laid the foundation of
 “ virtue and glory, entailed corruption and dishonour on
 “ your offspring. How different from the mothers of
 “ antiquity, who, having bred their sons to every thing
 “ manly and heroic, were accustomed when they went out
 “ to fight for their country,—(that great predominating
 “ object to which all others gave way in their affections,)—
 “ to charge them either to come back victorious, or to be
 “ brought back dead, chusing rather that they should not
 “ live than live in shame.”

Fordyce's Addresses to Young Men.

That the STAGE has defects, loud, crying defects, I am willing to acknowledge, but they are only excrescences, they disgrace the trunk, but they cannot vitiate it! It has sufficient strength to permit their eradication, and flourish with ten-fold vigour! But I trust it will be in my power to prove, that even in its present state, it is not composed of the deleterious qualities which bigotry, fanaticism, and ignorance, would endeavour to persuade us it is.

I deem a review of the lives of its principal professors to be a fair and justifiable mode of proving its tendency to morality, or its inclination to impurity. If the stage tends to corrupt and debase a nation, the players must, of all people, be the most depraved and infamous! Probably you will say, "That the agent merely administering poison, feels none of the effects." True—but if he be obliged to swallow his share of the baneful dose, he must participate in the fatal consequences. Let us commence our review, at the period when our stage was emerging from barbarism, when it had shaken off the impieties of "THE MYSTERIES," the absurdities of "THE MORALITIES;" when, like a summer's morn, preparing for the glorious effulgence of the sun, it dawned for the appearance of our great theatrical luminary! Still the theatre (if it might so be called) was even then in a most abject, a most degraded abasement. Not a single dramatic piece, produced previous to Shakespeare's plays, holds a situation

upon the present existing stage;—they are only to be found in the libraries of the curious*. All the inference to be drawn from the depression of the stage, at the period I have mentioned—is—that poverty and infamy compose a fruitful soil for the nourishment of every vice! To a society, in this despicable state, the young, the thoughtless Shakespeare, flew for shelter. An outcast from his country, branded with theft, and armed with graceless audacity to ridicule the magistrate whom he had injured; thrown upon the world without a friend or adviser; from this debased body he courted support!—To this sink he flew for refuge! What a sanctuary for a being of his description!—What a seminary for the improvement of his talents!—With such an auxiliary, possessing such wonderful endowments, such abandoned propensities, what were the players not capable of effecting in the cause of vice? Did they employ their new ally, their powerful agent, in the subversion of virtue, the corruption of morality, the degradation of religion? Let applauding millions answer, an admiring world reply!—His future progress unblemished!—His character unsullied!—His death

* One of the first regular comedies extant, in the English language, "GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE," was written by a clergyman, Dr. Still, successively master of St. John's and Trinity Colleges, Cambridge, and afterwards Bishop of Bath and Wells.

a nation's loss!—His life a nation's pride!—His grave marked by malice, as one of the few spots, where she can gain no footing*!—His memory and his works can only perish, when

“ The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 “ The solemn temples—the great globe itself—
 “ Yea all which it inherit shall dissolve,
 “ And, like the baseless fabric of a vision,
 “ Leave not a wreck behind!”

Many of his dramatic contemporaries have been handed down to posterity, marked with some pleasing trait, reflecting credit on their different characters. One of his brother comedians and particular friends, Alleyn, founded a college at Dulwich, for the relief of a certain number of old persons, where, to this day, age and poverty return thanks to heaven for ease and comfort, through the benevolence of a *profane* stage-player. From

* A modern vandal has had the impudent assurance to stigmatise him as a libertine; and asks with unparelled effrontery. “ What loss could society possibly have “ experienced, if the bard had never been called into “ existence?” When I first read this vampir of Collier—this furbisher up of old weapons, from the armoury of puritanical anti-stagers; I felt inclined to follow him through all his glaring absurdities, and, by exposing them, have left him to the contempt he deserves! But, upon mature reflection, I found it would only have been giving substance to a shadow, locality to nothing, consequence to insignificance and fuel to the flame of vanity!

the Shakesperian band, pass on to the company having possession of the theatre in the time of Charles I.* At the conclusion of this reign, the actors were thrown into a dilemma which completely put to the test their moral conduct. Suddenly bereft of their support, by the convulsions of the times—deprived of the protection of their patrons—persecuted by fanaticism—and anathematised by hypocrisy—they retained, not only their probity unshaken, but many of them had courage and

* “ It was in the time of Charles, Prynne (that most violent puritan) wrote a book against actors, called, “ *HISTRIOMATIX; OR THE PLAYERS SCOURGE.*’ In which “ he employs a world of learning to shew the injury they “ do; and he has been at the pains to look over one thousand authors on the subject, and prove that in two thousand years, a great number of writers expressed their “ disgust at seeing men upon the stage in women’s cloaths, “ for it was not then customary for any woman to appear “ in character. This furious republican, who, by his “ writings, contributed more than any other man, to the “ destruction of the monarchy, and the death of the king, “ after having lost his ears in the pillory for writing this “ very book, became as violent for the restoration; but “ what a world of mischief and blood-shed did he not occasion in the mean time. As a true lover of my country, “ and its establishment in church and state, I cannot help “ considering these attacks upon the stage, by the evangelical and modern puritans, as tending to the same end. “ It behoves the legislature to look to the consequence.”

D’ISRAELI’S CALANATIES OF AUTHORS.

resolution to preserve, and manifest their loyalty by fighting under the banners of their lawful sovereign. In the new plays produced immediately after the restoration, the dramatis personæ points out the rank held by two of them; Major Mohun and Captain Hart. Through the corrupt and dissipated reign of Charles II.* notwithstanding the stage participated strongly in the language and manners of the licentious court, we find nothing stated of the players being *pre-eminently* debauched, or setting the example, in their own persons, of the reprehensible voluptuousness of the time! On the contrary, Betterton (who lived to a very great age) is immortalised by the polished praise of Sir Richard Steele—classical genius, embalming perishable talent!

“ For he who struts his hour upon the stage,
 “ Can scarce extend his fame for half an age;
 “ Nor pen, nor pencil, can the actor save,
 “ But art and artist meet one common grave.”

An anonymous writer, after having given a most amiable picture of this highly esteemed performer,

* It is worthy of remark, that during the long reign of Charles II. there are but TWO DIVORCES on record. Yet stylish and fashionable females constantly attended the representation of plays, replete with noxious qualities, and remained—Prudes. In the latter end of the reign of George III. your stylish and fashionable females neglect the theatre, and remain—Coquettes!

observes, " To sum up all that we have been saying
 " upon the character of this extraordinary person-
 " age, as he was the most perfect model of dramatic
 " action, so was he the most unblemished pattern of
 " private and social qualities. Happy is it for that
 " player who imitates him in the one, and still more
 " happy that man who copies him in the other." Sir
 Richard Steele, in his *Tatler*, has been particularly
 attentive to the transcendent merits of Mr. Betterton;
 so much so that he occupies no small share
 of even the very first paper of that celebrated
 periodical work. In the 71st number he again
 speaks highly of him, for his performing *Hamlet*
 at the advanced age of 70.

Mr. Addison, in number 158, invites the town
 to attend Mr. Betterton on his benefit night, at the
 play-house in the Hay-market.

On Thursday, May 4, 1710, Sir Richard de-
 votes a great part of his essay to the memory of his
 departed excellence.

" Having received notice that the famous actor,
 " Mr. Betterton, was to be interred this evening in
 " the Cloisters, near Westminster Abbey, I was
 " resolved to walk thither, and see the last office done
 " to a man whom I had always very much admired,
 " and from whose action I had received more strong

“impressions of what is great and noble in human nature, than from the arguments of the most solid philosophers, or the description of the most charming poets I had ever read.”

“Such an actor as Mr. Betterton, ought to be recorded with the same respect as Roscius among the Romans.” “There is no human invention so aptly calculated for the forming a free born people as that of a theatre.” “Tully reports, that the celebrated player of whom I have been speaking, (Roscius) used frequently to say, ‘The perfection of an actor is only to become what he is doing.’” But extracts cannot do justice to Sir Richard’s comments.

I would recommend the perusal of the whole number to comprehend at once the great skill of the actor, and enjoy the additional gratification of the soundness of mind and liberality of heart evinced by the entertaining Bickerstaff.

It is, I believe, a generally received opinion, that the concomitant to a length of years, must be an unsullied conscience, rectitude of conduct, and peace of mind. The vicious man *may* have strength of frame to encounter the shocks of unruly passions; or he *may* have the fortune to escape the retributive punishment of guilt: he *may* live to wear the silver badge of virtuous longevity—

but I am persuaded such instances are rare. With heart-felt satisfaction can I confidently point to my profession for innumerable proofs of persons enjoying “age like a lusty winter, frosty, but kindly*.”

Nor do I remember a solitary instance of ONE, from the querulousness of age, the fear of death, or the retrospection of the past, falling into the gloom of methodism, or the depraved and desperate state of atheism; but, with a meek and devout christian fervour, resigning their souls to the equal judge of all, with the firm conviction, that they shall not be arraigned at the awful bar as PLAYERS, but as MEN. This digression, having truth for its support, serves to elucidate my position, that stage-performers are not more vicious, nor more corrupt than their fellow mortals:—however, we now return to the histrionical review; and, passing to Booth, Cibber, and Wilkes, we have only additional specimens of genius, urbanity and pro-

* I will give a few out of the many to prove it: Alleym, 70—Betterton, 75—Mrs. Betterton, 67—Colley Cibber, 87—Quin, 73—Rich, 70—Yates, 90—Bowman, 85—Beard, 75—Leveridge, 88—Macklin, 107—Jefferson, 76—Hull, 78—Packer, 75—King, 75—Havard, 68—Moody, 84—Mrs. Clive, 75, Lee Lewes, 70—Hirst, 70—Mattocks, 65—Lewis, 64—Mrs. Crawford, 72—C. Bannister, 66—Bland, 80. LIVING, Mr. Smith, 83—O'Brien, 75—Waldron, 70—Wewitzer, 64—Quick, 64—Mrs. Abingdon, 78—Miss Pope, 69—Mrs. Mattocks, 67—Mrs. Leng, 76.

bity*. Bring it down to Garrick, not one is to be found whom liberality would wish to erase from

* Davies, in his "Dramatic Miscellanies," has recorded an anecdote of Mrs. Porter, (a celebrated actress of this period) which cannot be too generally known. Her place of residence being in the country, she was under the necessity of keeping a one horse chaise for the convenience of attending her professional duties; her constant companions were a book and a brace of pistols.—"In the summer of 1731, as she was taking the air, she was stopped by a highwayman, who demanded her money. She had the courage to present one of her pistols to him; the man, who had perhaps with him only the appearance of fire-arms, assured her that he was no common thief; that robbing on the highway was not to him a matter of choice, but necessity, and in order to relieve the wants of his poor distressed family. He informed her at the same time where he lived, and told her such a melancholy story that she gave him all the money in her purse, which was about ten guineas. The man left her; upon this she gave a lash to her horse; he suddenly started out of the track, and the chaise was overthrown; this occasioned the dislocation of her thigh-bones. Let it be remembered, to her honour, that notwithstanding this unlucky and painful accident, she made strict inquiry after the robber, and finding that he had not deceived her, she raised amongst her acquaintance about sixty pounds, which she took care to send him.

"Such an action in a person of high rank, would have been celebrated as something great and heroic: the feeling mind will make no distinction between the generosity of an actress and that of a princess."

the page of biography. I decline particularizing others, more from the fear of becoming tedious, than from the want of materials. The curious or the incredulous may easily satisfy themselves by applying to any one of the many volumes published of the lives of theatrical professors.

The present principal actors are too well known to require an eulogium; I shall only say, that, collectively, they may vie with any body of men, for propriety and decorum; and individually they would not disgrace any station, however exalted.

I have advanced plain, unadorned, and stubborn facts. I can still go further, and aver, that there is no instance on record of a stage-player suffering a shameful and ignominious death! I am well aware this assertion may provoke the witticisms of the witling, the jest of the joker, the malignancy of the methodist, and perhaps the contemptuous smile of all. Still, still, it is a glorious superiority! What other BODY can boast so immaculate a pre-eminence?—Is it—But I will not pursue the ungrateful subject, conscious the stage requires no such invidious comparisons to establish its noble utility and purity.

Let the defenders of methodism and the WOULD-BE oppressors of the stage, exercise their ingenuity

and their indefatigable researches, to find, in the whole catalogue of histriones, a parallel for the preacher Wheatley ; the unworthy contemporary of the two Wesleys.—A wretch, who, under the garb of religion, exercised the base arts of a nefarious seducer, upon the unsuspecting females of the sisterhood, to an extent that would have disgraced the most depraved appetite of the most unprincipled debauchee, ever recorded in the polluted annals of gallantry. It is true, his expulsion followed his final detection, but the mischief he did in the time is incalculable. We may partly judge of his depredations under his religious disguise, when we are informed, that three years after he had been expelled with the brand of infamy fixed upon him,—“ the
 “ mayor of the city of Norwich, was employed a
 “ WHOLE DAY in taking the affidavits of the
 “ WOMEN whom he had TRIED to CORRUPT.”

Far be it from my wish or intention to charge the vices of so base a monster upon a whole body. Yet from this, and MANY OTHER INSTANCES ON RECORD, they should shew some commiseration, for the frailties of their fellow-creatures. When the example of the early methodists, with Messrs. J. and C. Wesley at their head, could not effect a reformation in a man, who, independent of their instruction, must, from his situation, have been in hourly application to the scriptures. How more than illiberal it is in them to consign a body of

people to everlasting perdition, because it cannot feel their enthusiastic inspiration; and what is more to the credit of the condemned class—*will* not FEIGN it.

I may express myself strongly—but I feel—deeply feel, the depression of an honourable profession, by the injustice and obloquy heaped on it undeservedly—and that in an age when men pride themselves upon being unprejudiced in their opinions, enlightened in their minds, enlarged in their ideas.

Sincerely do I regret my powers and faculties are not equal to my feelings; proudly would I advocate its cause—do justice to its merits, and overwhelm its oppressors with shame and confusion.

If the outcry against actors were confined to the narrow-minded, to the fanatic, or the ignorant, it would require no great share of practical philosophy to endure it; but when we find members of every order, distinction and body, uniting, as it were, by common consent to depress genius merely because it is theatrical*, we have

* Mr. Evans, in his "Denominations of the Christian World," has omitted, (in his admirable essay, upon enthusiasm and superstition,) enumerating the dramatic art, with music, statuary, and painting. He says, "The poet, the musician, the painter, and the statuary also are expected,

nothing left, save the supplicating attitude of the Negro, encumbered with the manacles of prejudice, and exclaim—"Are we not your brethren!"

There is one class, or body of men, louder in their condemnation, and broader in their invectives against the use of a stage, than any other. I am almost inclined to attribute their attacks to a sort of jealousy, proceeding from a dread of rivalry.—But this is truly idle and ridiculous;—there are customers enough for both.—We do not depreciate their skill—we acknowledge *their* merits, and allow them to be very good actors*. Like the present

"and allowed to indulge an *enthusiastic* ardour in their professions; and for this trait in their characters, they are entitled to commendation."

Twelfth Edition, page lxix.

I should like to know why this ingenious author should mention the above arts, and reject the practical part of the drama? Where is the difference? Acting, like music, is an energy; painting and poetry are arts. The two former delight at the time of performance, the latter after it is over.

* I am happy to have the authority of Dr, Witherspoon for the confirmation of their skill in acting. "I myself," he observes, "in early life, knew a young man of good talents, who absolutely unfitted himself for public speaking by this practice. [MIMICRY] He was educated for the ministry, and was in every respect well qualified for the office; but having, without suspicion, frequently AMUSED HIMSELF and OTHERS, by imitating the tones and

dramatic world, they are divided into equestrians and pedestrians.—Like us they study stage effect, and are very attentive to costume. We confess, that in general they keep up to the character they have assumed better than we do.—Their disguise sits closer—they seldom betray who, or what, is the actor beneath. Be he pride, vanity, lust, avarice—zeal, sancity, fervour, and holiness, conceal him from the view! They do the trick without exposing the hand of the conjuror. The attention they pay to the exterior is very commendable*.—When you see one of them, you immediately feel a conviction of his being well habited for HIS PART. We will take an equestrian, to elucidate their skill in dress and acting. A suit of black, or sombre

“gestures of the most eminent preachers of the city where
 “he lived, and when he began to preach himself, he could
 “not avoid falling into one or other of those tones which
 “he had so often MIMIC’D. This, as soon as it was perceived,
 “threw the AUDIENCE into a BURST of LAUGHTER,
 “and he was soon obliged to quit the PROFESSION altogether,
 “for no other reason than that he had thus spoiled himself
 “by the talent of imitation.”

Dr. Witherspoon’s Letter.

I beg leave to designate the above facetious gentleman;
 THE COMIC PREACHING ROSCIUS!

* Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within, ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Matthew c. xxiii. v. 28.

colour—polished boots, without tops—hair smoothly combed, unruffled as his mind—a gravity of deportment—a sleek horse, dark and pampered like its rider.—an empty saddle-bag, an inuendo of its master's poverty, and emblematical of the owners brains. With slow, deliberate pace he moves his horse into the town; the news of the good mans arrival is therefore conveyed to the place of his destination, time enough for his host to receive him at the door with as much humility as a Franciscan friar would a cardinal. He is conducted to the best bed room, given the seat of pre-eminence, lives upon the choicest viands, reposes upon the softest bed. When conducted to his theatre, he receives the sighing approbation, and groaning acquiescence of all his auditors. He doles them out a long-winded speech, in the form of an extempore prayer, in which he too often forgets the reverence and awe due to the sacred cause of that Being whose servant he has the presumption to call himself*. He extols the humility, poverty and

* “ *Here is a damned soul, which Christ has evoked
“ from the hell of fire !* ”

O ! might the blood of sprinkling cry,
For those who spurn the sprinkled blood ;
Assert thy glorious deity !
Stretch out thy arm, thou Triune God,
The Unitarian fiend expel,
And chase his doctrine back to Hell.

41st Hymn, large Hymn Book.

sufferings of the early supporters and promulgators of the christian faith—but he keeps his horse! He talks of primitive times, primitive men, and primitive manners—but he keeps his horse: He expatiates upon charity, and his saddle-bags are remembered! If his rivals, the comedians, should be in town—a spider to a fly—a ferret to a rat—cannot be a more determined enemy. He fulminates them with brimstone; roasts them with fire; consigns them to the lowest pit of perdition*, and

“The Lord Jesus Christ vomited forth arianism, which ran like a stream into the gulph of Hell.”

Portraiture of Methodism, page 262, 264, 330.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing, in the synagogues, and in the corner of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Verily, I say unto you, they have THEIR REWARD.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

But when ye pray, use not VAIN REPETITIONS, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Matthew vi. 5, 6, 7.

* “At the theatre, when all is sunk in haughty forgetfulness of God; after the proud have once more displayed their brilliancy, and set their heart as the heart of God; after the eyes of vanity have for the last time, feasted themselves; after the tears which real guilt and misery

receives the sanction of his CHRISTIAN followers* !
He performs his limited engagement, and then

“ demanded have been wasted on fictitious crimes and
“ calamities, and the whole croud have been shaken with
“ the madness of laughter; after profaneness hath unfurled
“ its flag of defiance, with hell-bred gallantry setting at
“ nought the name of the Most High, the tremendous ope-
“ rations of Providence, and terrors of the bottomless pit;
“ after obscenity hath swallowed down its morsel of elegant
“ filthiness; let a celestial spirit shine forth, eclipsing the
“ luminaries of the place, (i. e, THE LAMPS AND CANDLES)
“ and scattering round those terrors which were once felt
“ at the sepulchre of Jesus of Nazareth ; and in such strains
“ as these, let his voice announce the hastening doom :—
“ Worms of the dust, enemies of the eternal God ! you
“ have long been the abhorrence of the inhabitants of
“ Heaven; you have disdained to seek Jesus, who was
“ crucified; the divine sorrows, the pure delights, which
“ his spirit creates in repenting souls you have rejected—
“ you have treated with derision; now the day of your
“ visitation expires. I swear by him that liveth for ever
“ and ever, you shall have time no longer! Then let
“ trembling rock the ground; let the fabric and its miser-
“ able assembly roll down the opening chasm, and let the
“ crowd of dislodged spirits behold the majestic unveiled
“ flaming countenance of their judge! WOULD SUCH VEN-
“ GEANCE BE TOO SEVERE. LET US NOT PRESUME TO SAY
“ IT WOULD.”

*From a Sermon preached by a Mr. Love, in
Artillery-lane, London.*

If this terrific minister of wrath be a specimen of Mr.
Love's angels, what are we to expect from his DEVILS?

proceeds to the next place appointed by his managers, and, REPETATUR HAUSTUS! Boils and ebullitions of a sound constitution! O Religion! thou only pure good on earth! "Balm of hurt minds!" "Chief nourisher in life's feast!"

Hundreds of souls to be suddenly immersed in the liquid fire, for participating in what *they* conceive an innocent amusement, and we are not to call it a severe punishment! I would recommend Mr. Love—an unfortunate name, for one composed of hatred and all uncharitableness—to peruse, with attention, the death of Stephen, and strive to gain some of the genuine fine traits of pure christianity. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying Lord Jesus receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, LAY NOT THIS SIN TO THEIR CHARGE."

Acts vii. 59, 60.

* But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Rom. xiv. 10. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. Mark xi. 26. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye. Matt. vii. 5.

Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,
Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

John vii. 15.

But I say unto you which hear, love your enemies; do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you and pray for them which despitefully use you.

Luke vi. 27, 28.

How is thy name degraded? What imposters,
what cheats assume thy livery! Who

“ Play such fantastic tricks before high Heaven,

“ As make the angels weep.”

“ When will the unbeliever learn the nature of
“ true religion from Jesus Christ himself, and not
“ from those of his *pretended* disciples, who retain
“ little or none of the lineaments of the divine
“ original.”

Having attempted a sketch of an equestrian saint in one theatre, I will now try my skill at an out-line of a pedestrian sinner in the other. And I think our wonder will be excited—not that there are so many vicious—but, that so many should escape from the pollution of habits engendered by poverty and contempt. A young man is enticed by indolence, thoughtlessness, or vivacity, to embrace a profession, in the art or mystery of which he is completely ignorant. The sinner, like the saint, experiences A CALL, mistaking intoxication for inspiration—and enthusiasm for vigour and capacity. He has beheld the stage heroes and heroines of his youthful recollection through the most flattering medium, crowned with praise, approbation and applause. He participates in the pleasure—repeats a speech—learns a part by rote—spouts away to himself and a few chosen associates—they extol his skill—his former thespian idols sink

far beneath his own ideal excellence—he feels himself their superior—the chair of Roscius appears within his grasp. His vanity thus inflamed, with all the impetuosity incident to youth, he enrols himself under the standard of the first itinerant manager who will receive him. He soon feels a sensible difference! The board of plenty is changed for that of indigence. *He* finds no suppliant host to greet his efforts with welcome and approbation! *He* finds no chearful fire side—no gentle courtesies to sooth his irritated mind! The town from which he had anticipated fame, renown, and all that folly could infuse into the brains of sanguine boyhood, is as indifferent to his public claims as it is careless about his private wants! He finds himself an isolated being in the midst of bustle—neglected—shunned—pointed at by scorn's slow UNMOVING finger! Banished from all respectable society*—

* If I permitted this passage to escape without a comment, I should expect (and richly merit) the reproach of many dear and valued friends. I therefore confess, with an indescribable satisfaction, that I have met, in the course of my theatrical progress, with courtesies, hospitality and liberality never to be forgotten, but tenaciously cherished with the fondest records of my happiest moments. York, Hull, Doncaster, Sheffield, Huddersfield, Horncastle and Birmingham will ever furnish me with the recollection of individual kindnesses, as flattering and as consolatory as the receiving of obligations without the power of a return can possibly be. Dublin, Waterford, Carrick-on-Suir, and

avoided like a pestilence!—his pride takes the alarm: he wishes to retreat—infatuation still prevails—and he quiescently submits to the opprobrious name of **PLAYER**, with every disgraceful epithet which illiberality and ignorance can bestow. If this should present itself to the sight of *one*, attracted by the glare of the stage, to him I will say, “Young and thoughtless adventurer, if sensibility makes any part of your composition, be content with your present station; regret not how humble, reflect not how irksome! The prodigal, when reduced to the state of a swine-herd, was not more an object of sympathy than the curse of feeling and susceptibility united in the wayward lot of an itinerant player!”

This is not an over-charged picture—too many have sat for the likeness! Some few are at this instant in London, receiving the reward of their industry, suffering and talent, by a liberal salary, and the countenance of genius, rank and literature—living instances that the stage (even in its present state) so far from debasing the mind of the professor—expands—invigorates it, and enables the actor to

Youghal, have the same demands upon my gratitude. With great sincerity of heart, I acknowledge them, and deeply deplore this acknowledgment is the only remuneration I can offer to evince the warm remembrance of the many civilities bestowed upon **A STRANGER AND A WANDERER.**

triumph over the difficulties and impediments thrown in his way by the selfish and narrow-minded. I am aware of a seeming contradiction in my attempting to dissuade young adventurers, at the same time I am producing instances of success. But there is defeat as well as victory in the contest; and, it is a struggle against fearful odds!

Nothing can more fully prove the absurdity of the prejudice against actors, than the treatment they experience as professors and men. The player, exercising his delightful art, soothes and enchants the beings who (when out of his fascinating sphere) combine to worry and torment him. He moves them to tears; excites them to laughter, at his pleasure; they applaud him to the skies—approve his skill—admire his art! The next day they avoid, despise, condemn him, and all without any investigation of his mind, principles, or manners.—He is a **PLAYER**;—that *one* word withers the culture of his mind, depraves his principles, corrupts his manners, and condemns him as an outcast*!

* I frequently compare the estimation we are held in by a large proportion of this OUR THINKING NATION, with the condition of the unfortunate DOGS upon the *whipping day* in York. This amiable ceremony originated during the enlightened days of our ancestors, when an ill stard, half starved, hungry dog thought proper to run away with the **FIX** from a priest officiating at mass. The fate of the culprit

To make my cabinet of portraits complete, I think it but my duty to present a *miniature likeness* of a PEDESTRIAN actor in our rival theatre. I likewise present it as a specimen of an intended work I purpose, at a future period, laying before the public, entitled “The genuine lives of several of our ERRATIC PREACHERS.”

Spiritual magazines, and evangelical productions of the same sprightly nature, I find to be in high repute with the serious and elect. Therefore, to amuse the lambs of grace, and give my trifling aid to the great work of regeneration, I will commence

may easily be conceived. But to perpetuate the *enormity* of his crime, upon the anniversary of that dreadful day, Ebor’s canine race suffer severely, if they have the temerity to show their noses in the public streets. At first, the punishment was inflicted not only by the priests, but we may presume by nearly the whole population of the city.

However, time (that will conquer most customs not secured upon the basis of rational principle) relaxed the rigour of the discipline, and it has now fallen into the hands of the junior MERCIFUL part of mankind.

Just so, the offences of the earlier stage fall upon us, and though the *full grown* enlightened mind despises such ridiculous prejudices—the boys in intellect pursue us still, and, like the dogs in York, we are most unmercifully castigated by the untoward urchins; still the comparison is in favour of the dogs—they are flogged but one day, we are in a state of punishment all the year round.

biographer*. My first subject will be "The wonderful conversion of Jeremiah Muggins, S. S."

* As many of my readers may imagine I have an intolerable share of vanity in thinking myself competent to the delicate task of delineating lives devoted to such high purposes; I will favour them with a few extracts from these sacred repositories for all good things, and then leave it to their decision how far I am qualified for my intended office. "Mr. Kilham," (the founder of the Kilhamites, seceders from the old connexion, giving an account of himself—for these saints very commonly compose their own legends) says, "When I was about four years old, I was taken by my parents to hear preaching, which caused me to be troubled for a season, but my heart being so deceitful, (AT FOUR YEARS OLD) I soon forgot what I had heard. I lived from my fifth to my twelfth or thirteenth year under many DIVINE IMPRESSIONS!"

Methodist Magazine, March, 1799.

THIS MR. KILHAM DYING IN THE PRIME OF LIFE, RATHER SUDDENLY, MANY OF THE CHRISTIAN SUPPORTERS OF THE OLD CONNEXION, DID NOT HESITATE IN PRONOUNCING IT A PUNISHMENT FROM GOD, FOR HIS SECESSION.

"Thomas Banner, a child of eleven years of age, in his last fit of sickness, exclaimed in a kind of rapture, 'Oh, mammy, I love God—I do love him—I love him with all my heart!'"

Ibid.

I remember meeting with a work, published in the reign of William and Mary, entitled, "Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence." Among a variety of other curious specimens, the following seemed to me incomparable, but I believe

Jeremiah Muggins is descended from poor, but industrious, honest parents. Education he had none, Sunday schools not being then established:—

our modern religious magazines will soon deprive it of that superiority it once possessed in my mind.

Mr. William Stuart preaching lately in Forres upon this text, OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE; said, "Sirs, I will explain these words in a very homely manner, there was a godly man of my acquaintance, sirs, he had a young bairn that was dying, and he comes to him and said, Sandy, now my cockey, believe in God now, for ye will not live long. No, no, said the bairn, I will not believe in God, for God is a boo, but I will believe in Christ, for he is sweet, daddy, and he is good. Now ye may by this see, sirs, that God, without Christ, is a boo," i. e. a bugbear!!!

4th edition, page 100, dated 1732.

"Mary Humphries, at the age of 18, a sinner, prevailed upon to attend a prayer-meeting. The preacher in praying, enquired of the Lord—If there were not a weeping Mary among them? Her heart said, "I am here!" In these duties she sat under his shadow with great delight, and her inward man was fed with hidden manna."

Methodist Magazine, August, 1799,

The delirium, so frequently attending fever, and the bed of death, is always brought forward as the divine operations of the spirit, signs of grace, and tokens of death-bed felicity. "At this period he appeared exhorting his friends, and the faint-hearted,"—"again, as if preaching to a congregation," "now he would be administering the blessed cup, and again crying out, Lord, now I behold thee, &c. &c."

Jeremy had no other advantage than what lettered ginger-bread, or the common horn-book could afford him. His father, being what the profane termed a Muggletonian, endeavoured to implant in Jerry's early mind the seeds of grace, but Satan scattered them abroad like chaff, and weeds and thistles marked the desolation of his soul. Nothing gave him delight, save ballad-singing, cock-fighting, badger-hunting, bull-baiting, wrestling, cudgeling, drinking, boxing, wenching. But what made his sinful course appear more desperate, was, the strong inclination he had for visiting the **PLAY-HOUSE!**—That tabernacle of the Devil!—The pit of Hell!—Boxes for the train of Lucifer! Galleries for the high throne of Satan!—The castle of Belzebub!—The high road to destruction!—The sink of all filth and unrighteousness!—A garnished sepulchre!—The Devil's church and temple!—Satanical fables!—Diabolical mysteries!—Hellish conventicles!—An Apprenticeship of sin!—A trade of wickedness which leads to Hell!—The Devil's solemnities, or pomps!—Mammon's vineyard, where Satan's labourers work for the wages of sin

John Wesley, when delirious in Ireland, spouted Shakespeare; yet, in his sober senses, he has honoured him with the title of "our **HEATHEN POET.**"

Coke's Life of Wesley, page 397.

and iniquity!—The toy-shop of vanity, supported by the Devil's buffoons! Roisters, brawlers, ill-dealers, boasters, stallions, ruffians*!!!

Unhappy Jerry! what a perilous place for thy poor miserable sin-drenched soul! |However, the day of conversion was at hand, and the way of faith and the instantaneous operation of the spirit, to be made manifold by the after aid of this abandoned sinner.

In the year of our Lord, 1780, Mr. Wesley held forth in the town of C—— giving manna to the starved, and balm to the thirsty! Jeremiah was tempted by a wicked and a mischievous curiosity to attend the good man. Happy moment! Wonderful conversion! The scales dropped from his eyes! He roared aloud for help! In less than a week the work of regeneration was accomplished—in less than a fortnight he exhorted—in less than a month he was a preacher with many followers!!!

* Far be it from my wish, to receive approbation at the expence of another, I must therefore inform my reader that I cannot lay claim to the invention of one of those elegant and ingenious epithets; I have borrowed them from different liberal publications I have had the great satisfaction of perusing.

And as it is awfully curious to observe the conflicts of the flesh and the devil against the inward workings of the new man, it is no less satisfactory to record their progress. Jerry's lips were first touched with the words of wisdom in presence of several of the brethren at a class-meeting held at the house of John Grouse, the unworthy writer of this. Jeremiah suddenly stood on his feet—he looked wildly—we were all troubled, fearing a backsliding; but we were graciously relieved from our suspense, by Jerry's exclaiming, “It has pleased the Lord to build a few houses o’ top o’ Meadow Bank!—Praise to the Lord!—Let each house become a tabernacle to the Lord, and have a HALTER therein, for the use of the brethren. Amen! Amen!” I give his own unsophisticated language to encourage those, who, strong with the Spirit, are yet deterred from utterance through ignorance of their own vernacular tongue.

If thou feel thou hast a call, never regret thy want of education—the operation of the spirit is great! Heed not thy trade, thy family; there will be souls when there will not be shoes! The time will come when nakedness will not be an abomination, and the garb of the elect will avail thee more than breeches, though they be made—of leather!

The first text* Jerry held forth on, was from 2 Kings iv. 38. "Set on the great pot†." The next, "Two legs and a piece of an ear."

(*To be continued.*)

In the foregoing specimen, I have not availed myself of the particular providences always attending this peculiarly happy class of men, inspired in their minds, invulnerable in their bodies. Be they

* Were I to indulge myself in exposing the many absurdities of their sermons, which have fallen within my own knowledge, I could considerably swell the bulk of my book, but I should not add much to the stock of rational knowledge: however I cannot resist recording ONE. The preacher gave out his text from Matthew xxi. 5. "Thy King cometh unto thee meek, and sitting upon an ass." He then began, "How did the blessed Saviour enter his own city? Not in a flaunting coach and six—not in a mail and four—no! nor even a post chaise and pair!—no, nor a tandem, nor a gig—nor on a horse—but on the back of an ass, *meek and lowly, as I would have done!!!*" A Scotch preacher (of the same genus with the foregoing Worthy) in descanting on this text, said, "That Christ was not proud nor lordly, for he rode upon an ass, which is a laigh (i. e. low) beast, and wherefore think ye did he this? It was, sirs, for the conveniency of the old wives that followed him, that he might kuttle (i. e. whisper) the gospel in their ears as he went along."

Scotch Presbyterian Elequence, 4th edit. page 100.

† Vide Nightingale's Portraiture of Methodism, page 254—258.

opposed by learning and philosophy? The operations of the spirit enable them immediately to confound and overwhelm their opponents. Are they attacked by a rabble? They receive no injury.

Mr. John Wesley, independent of his escape from fire, in his infancy, was ever remarkable for the astonishing interposition of an invisible power in his behalf. Mr. Nightingale, in his "Portraiture of Methodism," furnishes us with some very wonderful instances from a publication of Mr. Wesley's, printed about the year 1745, giving an account of several violent proceedings against the Methodists, particularly in 1744, at Wednesbury. The reverend Arminian father makes the following observations upon his dangers and difficulties in this business.

" I never saw such a chain of PROVIDENCES
 " before, so many convincing proofs that the hand
 " of God is on every person, and thing, over-
 " ruling him as it seemeth good. Among these
 " I cannot but reckon the circumstances that follow :

1st. " That they endeavoured, abundance of
 " times, to trip me up, as we went down hill, over
 " the wet slippery grass to the town ; as well judging
 " that if I was once on the ground, I should hardly
 " rise again; but I made no slip, nor the least stumble
 " at all, till I was entirely out of their hands.

2d. "That though many strove to lay hold on
 "my collar, or cloaths, they could not fasten at all;
 "their fingers, I CANNOT TELL HOW, slipping along
 "without fixing once; only, one man seized the
 "flap of my waistcoat and took it away with him:
 "the other flap, in the pocket of which was a twenty
 "pound note, was torn but half off." (Money, that
 filthy mammon, becomes sacred in their possession!—
 Wonderful! wonderful! most wonderful!!)

3d. "That a lusty man, just behind, struck at
 "me with a large oaken stick, with which if he had
 "struck me in the back of the head, I should
 "probably have preached no more; but every time
 "the blow was turned aside, I KNOW NOT HOW, for
 "I could not move to the right hand or to the left.

4th. "That another man came rushing through
 "the press, raised his arm to strike, let it sink again,
 "and stroking my head said 'What soft hair he has!
 "I cannot find in my heart to hurt him, &c. &c.'
 "The cry of most was, 'Away with him, away
 "with him;' of others, 'Kill him at once:'
 "But none so much as once mentioned how, only
 "ONE or TWO (I almost tremble to relate it) screamed
 "out (with what meaning I cannot tell) 'CRUCIFY
 "the DOG, CRUCIFY HIM*.' Two years since,

* Much to the credit of Mr. Wesley's reputation, Dr. Coke and Mr. Moore have omitted this singular passage in

“ one threw at me a piece of brick, which grazed on
 “ my shoulder, but hurt me not. It was a year after,
 “ that another threw a stone, which struck me be-
 “ tween the eyes, but the hurt was soon healed,
 “ and still no man had power to lay a hand upon me.”

“ At St. Ives, last month, I received one blow,
 “ the first I ever had, on the side of the head, and
 “ this night two, one before we came into the town,
 “ and one after I was going out into the meadows.
 “ But though one man struck me on the breast
 “ with all his might, and the other on the mouth,
 “ so that the blood gushed out; I felt no more pain
 “ from either of the blows than if they had touched
 “ me with a straw!!!”

October 22, 1743.

Portraiture of Methodism, page 159.

their history of this extraordinary, and I will add, great man. It gave me no small degree of surprise, as well as pleasure, to find so many quotations from our divine dramatic bard, interspersed through the above gentlemen's work. To which of them we are indebted for this proof of taste, it is beyond my power to ascertain. But it would be curious to hear their justification for borrowing from that which they mark with infamy.

Perhaps, as “ the Devil can quote scripture to suit his purpose,” the SAINTS have an equal privilege, and can cite passages from those books they declare dedicated to the use of his temple and worship.

But it is not to Mr. Wesley alone, these providential interpositions have been shewn. All the preachers have participated in the same invisible care, nor are they confined to his sect; they not only protected one of his rivals, the late reverend Mr. Huntingdon, but furnished him with food, raiment, money, chapel, wife, coach, horses, farm—in short, every thing desirable in life down to the most trifling articles. At building his new tabernacle, which he called “Providence Chapel,” the people, he says, “first offered £11, and laid it “on the foundation at the beginning of the “building.”

“A good gentleman, with whom I had but little “acquaintance, and of whom I bought a load of “timber, sent it in with a bill and receipt in full, “as a present to the Chapel of Providence. “Another good man came with tears in his eyes, “and blessed me, and desired to paint my pulpit, “desk, &c. as a present to the chapel. Another “person gave half a dozen chairs for the vestry; “and my friends Mr. and Mrs. Lyons furnished “me with a tea chest, well stored, and a set of “china. My good friends, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, “furnished me with a very handsome bed, bed- “stead, and all its furniture and necessaries, that I “might not be under the necessity of walking “home in the cold winter nights,” O indulgence, and luxury, what changes do ye work in your

votaries ! An errand boy, a daily labourer, and a cobbler, shrinking with apprehension from the "winter's flaw." O age of wonders! blunders! and absurdities! "*A daughter of mine in the faith*," "gave me—A LOOKING GLASS for my chapel study" Unless the good Mr. Huntingdon meant to joke with us, the name of this daughter must certainly have been VANITY! Probably there may be some latent mystic meaning, under the term looking glass; perhaps he did not absolutely mean *bona fide* a mirror. But we will leave the investigation of it to his enlightened followers, and all other able interpreters of obscure texts.

"Another friend gave me my pulpit cushion
 "and a book case for my study. Another gave
 "me a book-case for my vestry; and my good
 "friend Mr. E. seemed to level all his displeasure
 "at the devil, for he was in hopes I should be
 "enabled, through the gracious arm of the Lord,
 "to cut Rahab in pieces; therefore he furnished
 "me with the sword of the spirit—a new Bible,
 "with MOROCCO binding and SILVER CLASPS."

Of what possible service this finery could be in his attack upon Rahab, I cannot imagine. They are always telling us, the devil is too fond of splendour, to shrink from it. The gifts I have selected from the eleemosynary catalogue, furnished by the coal-heaving prophet, form but a

very small part of the tribute paid by Credulity at the altar of Imposition. He had a "BANK OF FAITH" to draw upon, and he was by no means delicate or penurious in his applications.

Most of the Methodist preachers are ambitious to encounter occasions for the exhibition of these singular PROVIDENCES in their favour. One known in the North of England by the name of the preaching buckle-maker, says, "This day a stone hit me on my head, but not to do me any material hurt; and my Saviour comforted me. This was the only time that I was ever hit, though I have been where SHOWERS of ROTTEN EGGS, and other things have been thrown at me. I have reason indeed to be thankful that none was ever permitted to touch me, save this one stone. Was thy servant Stephen stoned to death, and must I, thy poor unworthy servant, less than the unworthiest of all, have but one stone!!!

Mr. Wesley says, "The Methodists alone" (that is, they are the only body of people who can boast this extensive liberality) "do not insist on your holding *this or that opinion*, but they THINK and LET THINK."

Thinks-I-to-myself, they are most woefully fallen off from this high and advantageous position. Without entering into the intolerant notions they

entertain of every other sect, look at the history of their own divisions—their bickerings—their squabbles—and their schisms. Read the different pamphlets composed during the contention between the societies and the conference—look at the proceedings of the whole affair up to the expulsion of Mr. Kilham—let them separately examine their mortal antipathy to each other, and then let them expatiate on liberality, freedom of opinion, brotherly love, charity—in short, let them avow, if they dare, whatever THEY MAY THINK, that they LET THINK. Practical observation, after all, is a sure touch-stone; let us apply it in the present instance. Let each man possessing the smallest degree of penetration, observe the people designating themselves Methodists. What is their great and wonderful superiority? Are they strictly attentive to the relative duties which should bind us more closely to each other? Do we not on the contrary (generally speaking) find them selfish, gloomy, and unsocial? Dead to the wants of those around them—alive only to their own little, narrow, dirty interests.

How are they in trade? Are they more liberal in their modes of dealing? Are they more strict in their word, or less anxious at over-reaching in a bargain, than their fellow creatures? Where is the great advantage they have gained? In what is it evinced? The natural attendants upon a clear and good conscience, are cheerfulness of manner, a

suavity of temper, and a general love for the whole creation! Do they possess any of these signs? Look at them! After having felt the sacred call—after having received the precious assurance of God's particular regard—does not that make them more cheerful?—No.—And if their “*inward man*” be really fed by hidden manna, it must be of a very sour and nauseous nature, to make such an impression upon the features of the *outward* and visible man.

Are they more rational in their domesticated amusements than their frail brothers and sisters in the flesh?—AMUSEMENTS!—Yes, amusements;—Believe me, it is the intention of an all-wise God, that man should participate in joy as well as grief; mirth as well as sorrow, relaxation as well as employment. Let the mind be wholly absorbed by sorrow, or engrossed by pleasure;—in the one instance it incapacitates the owner for any other situation than that of a candidate for Bedlam, and in the other, degrades him into a sensual reptile, who will sink into an early grave enervated and despised. I will not attempt to insinuate that this pious class are sensualists; on the contrary, the general weakness of their intellect is too apt to take another bias:—however, they are not without their AMUSEMENTS.—In fact, with the *visionaries* of the sect, their whole pursuit is amusement, from their five o'clock prayer in the morning, until their deprecatory orison at night.

But they have watch-nights, love-feasts, hymns, bibliomancy, sacred lottery, witch stories, ghost tales, and religious scandal.

For the particulars of the watch-nights and love-feasts, &c. &c. I refer the inquisitive reader to Mr. Nightingale's PORTRAITURE OF METHODISM. Bibliomancy, or divination by the Bible, (the sortes virgilianæ of the Romans) though practised as an amusement by the fair sisterhood, is frequently the sole guidance of the leaders and preachers*. The sacred lottery is drawn by means of printed cards, containing texts of a cheerful and enlivening nature, and when a sister draws one, she purchases, cheaply, momentary satisfaction.

* "I continued thus to seek it (though with strange indifference, dullness, and coldness, and unusually frequent relapses into sin) till Wednesday, May 24th. I think it was about five this morning, I opened my Testament on those words, *There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.*" 2. Peter i. 4. "Just as I went out I opened it again on these words, *Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*"

Coke and Moore's Life of Wesley, p. 158.

Mr. Wesley having sanctioned divination by his own example, it cannot be a matter of surprise that most of his followers should look up to this mysterious art with great hope and reliance, notwithstanding he subsequently marked the custom with disapprobation.

Did they stop here, who could condemn them? Who but would pity them, for depriving themselves of so many sources of rational amusement to fritter away life in religious trifling*? But here they do not stop.—The sweetest things will cloy. When hymns, ghosts, witches, bibliomancy, and the sacred lottery have been exhausted, then comes on the formidable fiery ordeal, through which the characters of all within their ken, must pass. How few will pass unhurt, I can only imagine, by the outcry raised against them for their propensity to this uncharitable, unchristian-like attack upon their absent neighbours†. The

* Knowing the aptitude of this most respectable body to twist and torture plain sense, I think it necessary to state, that I mean downright TRIFLING, however they may flatter themselves that they are all the time religious because they are SERIOUS.

The sapient gentleman who counted the number of letters in the old and new Testament, must have been one of these amusing *serious* triflers.

† I cannot confine this *religious* stricture to the Methodists;—I have known women of birth and fortune, with no inconsiderable share of intellect, after having become *serious, evangelical, vital* christians (i. e. STEPPING STONES TO METHODISM) turn out the most loquacious gossips in the parish, entertaining their guests with anecdotes better calculated for a tele-a-tete over a washing-tub, or the borachio of a barber's shop, than a drawing-

life of the female Methodist can only be paralleled by Mrs. Graham's description of the ladies composing a mahomedan Haram. "They mutter their prayers, and some of them read the Koran, but not one in a thousand of them understands it. They thread beads, plait coloured silks, sleep, quarrel, make pastry, and chew betel, in the same daily round."

But to return to the object of their hatred.—If the use of a theatre be attended with all the abominations described by these brawling sons of zeal and bigotry, how comes it that Jesus and his apostles remain silent on the subject? Why did they not, in express terms, forbid the use of it? They have been minutely particular, not only upon the commission of crimes, but explicit in their condemnation of every remote agent and conductor to vice. We are instructed to "abstain from all appearance of evil." The usurpers of the apostolic mission trick out the stage, not only as

room. I suppose it is all for the good of our souls that they endeavour to support a system of family *espionage* throughout the kingdom.—Nay, if any of these rich PRECISE should get familiar footing in your house, they will not only tell you what is passing under every roof in the hundred, but will edify you with gratuitous lectures upon the improprieties of each department in your own economy.

the tempter, but actually the encourager, supporter, promoter, and patron of every vice. Surely their zealous fears either aggravate and over-charge the picture, or the apostles were remiss in their duty. I leave it to the rational and truly religious to decide, which of the parties are in error.

It is a subject for curious admiration, that in the whole ministration of our blessed Saviour and his chosen followers, there is no evidence of their ever taking advantage of popular opinions to establish their cause, or add to the number of their proselytes.

The woman taken in adultery; gathering ears of corn on the sabbath; eating with publicans, and a variety of instances, will fully elucidate my assertion.

Their silence upon the use of a theatre in Jerusalem is another striking proof. An establishment forced upon the inhabitants at the expence of several lives, by Herod the great—an amusement so diametrically opposite to the laws and customs of the Jews—an innovation so violent to their feelings and inclinations—must have been in a very feeble, precarious state; particularly when it had lost its founder and supporter by the decease of Herod.—Yet, notwithstanding the temptation to popularity, and the evident respect he pays to the

customs of his country, Jesus passes it by without the slightest mark of condemnation, in which he is imitated by the whole of his apostles*.

The *immediate* followers of our blessed Saviour were persecuted, despised, contemned; sealing their belief in their great instructors doctrine, by meekness, humility, forbearance, charity, and death itself! They endeavoured to conquer the enemies of their faith by peace and good-will. They would not destroy or anathematise their bitterest foes, but they were ready to shed their blood in defence of their ministration. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive them that trespass against us" with them was not lip-service, it was indelibly engraved on the heart—incorporated itself with their natures—regulated their actions—purified their thoughts—and endeared them to their great exemplar. Look at the mildness, the simplicity, the philanthropy of the apostles; their continual prayers and intercessions with the Almighty for mercy upon the ungodly. "The primitive christians were of a joyous as well as of a devout turn of mind. Being justified by faith they had PEACE with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Believing they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

* Vide Father Caffaro's letter, p. 84.

Turn an eye upon our modern saints.—What a contrast!—An affected sternness of manner*—a brutality of behaviour—a frantic bellowing of voice, more in unison with an enthusiastic priest of Bellona, than the humble and meek attendant upon the merciful God of peace and concord. Threatening, not soothing; denouncing, not praying; cursing, not blessing; are the marks of the beast upon them †! They cannot feel the genuine principles of christianity. Are they not misled by false lights—groping in the dark—insensible to the divine emanations of its exalted founder!

“ When will the unbeliever learn the nature

* Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

But thou when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy father which is in secret, and thy father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Matt, vi. 16, 17, 18.

† But I say unto you which hear, love your enemies, do them good which hate you.

Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

Luke vi. 27, 28.

“ of true religion from Jesus Christ himself, and
 “ not from those of his (PRETENDED) disciples
 “ who retain little or none of the lineaments of the
 “ divine original.”

But if these self elected encroachers deserve reprobation, what are we to say to the contracted illiberality of some of the ministers of the establishment? What language can be sufficiently strong to condemn those who have the temerity to sully the pulpit of toleration with the dogmas, ravings and perplexities of these modern corrupters of sense, decency, grace, religion and virtue*. “ Can words more clearly express the honour and worship we are to pay to God, or can more familiar expressions be given in this case than are to be found in the gospel? Is there any thing relating to divine worship that we want instructing in? Are not the duties which we owe to each other made evident and plain? And can there be any dispute about them, except what arise from LUST, or AVARICE, or other SELF-INTEREST†?”

* Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.

Acts xx. 30.

† I have in my possession some private anecdotes respecting church building and pew letting, that furnish me with ample retaliation for all the abuse lavished on us from some pulpits I could mention.—But I forbear; and hope

Some of this description have had the presumption to denounce vengeance, from the rostrum of peace, upon those who shall dare to enter within the walls of a playhouse* ; notwithstanding it is an establishment built and carried on under the sanction of a legislative act, and should be considered property as strongly secured from the scurrilous attacks of an individual, as a banker's—a merchant's—or any other legal commercial concern. If the power of the legislature encourages and entitles me to speculate in the erection of a theatre, and I am afterwards at the mercy of bigotry, ignorance, or perhaps design—I say the law in that particular is defective, and I am cheated with the shadow for the substance! I again avow and protest, that I have the greatest veneration, respect, and esteem for the clerical body at large; nor do I intend to offer the smallest insult to those who act consistently with the tolerant disposition of the mildest church ever founded. I feel a conviction the major part of them must condemn the supererogatory interference of some of their brethren, who interweave in their discourses

that those whom it may concern, will condescend to take a lesson from a POOR STAGE PLAYER.

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.

Luke vi. 37, 38.

* Vide Introductory Letter, page 67.

pointed invectives and bitter anathemas against a profession which is sanctioned by the laws of the land, and has been strongly countenanced by one of the most moral and religious princes that ever graced a throne*.

In their attacks they too frequently evince a disposition more congenial to the fanatic field-preacher, than to the gentleman, the scholar, or the divine, and must call for a rebuke sharper than it is in my power to bestow.

* With such an amiable living example before our eyes, of both religion and morality, a methodistical stage opponent has had the temerity to propose the following question : " How has it happened if the stage be the school of " virtue, that the most dissolute and abandoned of mankind are its passionate admirers, and warmest advocates, " that those who trample on every moral obligation, and " despise the sanctions of religion, have, in every age, " afforded the theatre their most cordial support ? " This is a happy specimen of their disingenuous mode of attack—where a man will have the effrontary to make a bold affirmation, which he knows to be UNTRUE, and, with all the trick of cunning, give it the form of an ingenuous quere.

Let me state the question : " How has it happened, if " the stage be NOT the school of virtue, that George III. " Addison, Young, and Johnson, have given it their warmest " countenance and support ? " But the religion of such men our fanatics cannot appreciate, and their morality they despise.

This must not be considered irrelevant to the subject.—I am pointing out the arch enemies of my profession. They are aware of the ascendancy of the stage—they dread it. They know it is the powerful barrier against an inundation of hypocritical fanaticism*.

* “To such christians I would recommend consistency, “and advise them never to absent themselves from the “theatre, when the play-bills announce for performance—
“THE HYPOCRITE,”

Let the GALLED *jade* wince!

The reasons why the ancient Fathers wished to suppress the stage, have already been given; they do honour to their piety, and justify their zeal for the establishment of christianity, over a religion false as it was inefficient.

But our modern zealots, oppose it, “as a step on which “they must fall down, or else o’erleap,” before they can accomplish their wish and aim of DOMINATION in religion. When the CONFERENCE shall become BISHOPS, then the elect will triumph, and that they have no objection to episcopacy, the reader will find elucidated in Nightingale’s “PORTRAITURE OF METHODISM,” page 401.

An Impromptu by the Rev. C. Wesley.

So easily are bishop’s made
By man’s or woman’s whim,
Wesley his hands on Coke hath laid,
But who laid hands on him?

Doctor Coke is the ARCH-Bishop of Columbia, and founder of the METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH in America.

To level it, they apply all their engines of bigotry, aspersion, condemnation, falsehood, denunciation, malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness. They abhor satire, however just; they tremblingly shrink from an investigation of their principles, and would gladly extirpate the profession which has still the honesty to expose vice, folly, and hypocrisy, under whatever garb they should have the presumption to appear. Thus, as the selfish promoters of their own sinister ends at the expence of taste, genius, and rational recreation, it is the duty of every honest man to strip them of their assumed holiness—lay them open to the world—expose their baseness and corruption—and consign them to the neglect and contumely they so richly merit*.

Would I could close my complaints on religious interposition here! I have witnessed many lamentable instances of the inveterate dislike and the ungenerous opposition the stage experiences from the clergy of the Romish persuasion in Ireland. I am inclined to hope it is only from the ignorant part of them;—but my candour will not permit

* O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord.

Acts xiii. 10.

me to conceal that many of them take the most unjustifiable means to crush it.

Should this mode receive the sanction of the more enlightened part of them, I can only say it is another and another proof of the fallacy, inconsistency, and weakness of human nature. Can the same being claim toleration for himself and yet be intolerant to others?—How repugnant to decency—how derogatory to reason—how preposterous to common sense must it appear to hear a priest, from the altar of his God, threaten his flock with the privation of confession, communion, absolution, and all the consolations of their religion, should they presume to witness a dramatic representation. Is this toleration? In the full plenitude of power, with all the aid of ecclesiastical vengeance I presume——

However, the present delicate situation of so large and respectable a body as the Irish Roman Catholics, prevents me from saying more upon the interference of their priests in stage amusements: my subject would not permit me to say less, nor can I dismiss it without condemnation for the unchristian spirit they evince in their manner of opposing a theatre. One of the brightest ornaments of their persuasion has said

“ *That mercy I to other’s shew,*
“ *That mercy shew to me.*”

Strongly, but modestly, would I recommend to their serious attention the following conclusion of one of *our* MORAL SERMONS, wherein they will perceive we are assistants in their cause, though they labour for our extinction.

“ Let us scorn to bow beneath the force of
 “ vulgar prejudice, and fold to our hearts, as
 “ brethren, in one large embrace, men of all ranks,
 “ all FAITHS, all PROFESSIONS.—The SOLDIER
 “ and the PRIEST; the PROTESTANT and the
 “ PAPIST; the PRINCE and the PEASANT:—let
 “ us believe them all alike to be virtuous, till we
 “ *know* them to be criminal, and engrave on our
 “ hearts, as the first and noblest rule of moral duty
 “ and of human justice, those blessed words,
 “ **“ BE TOLERANT ! ”**

I trust by my reference to the holy word for advice and direction on this subject, I shall have rescued it from the power of those men, who by misrepresentation, have laboured hard for its destruction.

When descanting on the evils of the stage, they create a monster, a chimera, and amuse themselves with combating it.—They endeavour to alarm, bully, and frighten by the constant reiteration of tremendous words.—But from such lips, and in such a cause, Hell, brimstone, and ever-

lasting torments evince verbosity without intellect, and denunciation without terror. We can apply to the *uncorrupted* source.—From THAT SOURCE we can imbibe comfort and consolation, and fly to the fountain of grace for refuge from the indecent violence of beings, perverse, prejudiced, and uncharitable.

My principal attempt in this feeble essay has been to vindicate my brethren from the odium bestowed on them by the DESIGNING, in the first instance, and increased by the unthinking and inconsiderate in the other. With respect to the vehicle itself, I have been anxious to prove that it is not prohibited by those who had the superior right of removing it from the list of human inventions. I still profess myself open to conviction with respect to its being congenial, or inimical, to the interests of virtue and morality. I do not mean to court controversy, for my own sake—No.—I hope to resign it into better hands. I wish to excite the learned and ingenious to the contest, with the strong belief and desire of reaping considerable profit. But had I the power to dictate, I would confine the contending parties to the last century, a space sufficiently extended to establish the point. I would earnestly entreat them to avoid broad, round assertions, proving nothing but spite and malice. I would deprecate the idea of their taking shelter in theatrical condemnations of ages past.

They may as well recommend the history of witchcraft to determine the principle of the air baloon. To wade through such stuff is "A miserable waste of precious time, and an enormous blasphemy against reason."

Among the modern objectors, some represent the stage "to be at best but a trifling amusement." Others say, "That the play-house is the resort of the idle, the vicious, and the dissipated." "That the promiscuous mixture is a deplorable circumstance."

With respect to the first objection, we trace its origin to persons, ignorant of human nature, as incapable of judging, as they are of feeling*. Religious utopians, who would banish all amusements as agents unworthy of participating in the reveries, occupying their *elevated* minds, and derogatory to the principles of their evangelical *seriousity*. Had they not, in conjunction with other enemies, subverted the intention of a theatre, by abusing and depreciating it, in the opinion of the million, it would be found capable of much nobler efforts than mere amusement. Still, even in that humble point of view, its advantages are great, for as the experience of ages has proved that mankind must have their hours of relaxation, where is the agent capable

* Vide page 113.

of affording it in so exalted a degree? The numerous enemies to the drama have so completely abridged its utility, that very few indeed are alive to its monitory effects, or its purifying capability. A man *may be* corrected of an error in a theatre, as he *may be* reformed in the church. In both instances, there must be at all events—ATTENTION and RESPECT. But we are frequently obliged to console ourselves with the idea that we have sent away a *careless* audience, at any rate NOT WORSE than we found them. If I may believe the Rev. Mr. Cookson, the same complaint is too applicable to the churches. He says in his FAMILY BIBLE, “A preacher cannot look around from the pulpit, “without observing that some are in a perpetual “whisper, and by their air and gesture giving “occasion to suspect that they are in those very “minutes defaming their neighbours; others, perhaps, to gratify the most unwarrantable desires, “have their eyes and their imagination constantly “engaged in such a circle of objects, that they “never once attend to the business of the place; “some have their minds wandering among idle, “worldly, or vicious thoughts; some lie at catch “to ridicule whatever they hear, and with much “wit and humour provide a stock of laughter, by “furnishing themselves from the pulpit. But of all “misbehaviour, none is comparable to that of those “who come to the house of God to sleep.” Acts xxi.

“ The play-house is the resort of the idle, the vicious, and the dissipated ;” so is every Methodist meeting house in the kingdom, as well as every other large assemblage. The idle, form an incorrigible class, possessing no resources within themselves, they congregate in herds, with the dismaying hope, each neighbour will assist the other in the destruction of time and reflection. I welcome them to the theatre, from the strong persuasion that they are employing their hours more rationally there than they would in many other places. The vicious and the dissipated we cannot preclude, nor will I abandon the hope, (until I receive proof to the contrary,) that we sometimes are the agents to awake them from their lethargy, and animate them to pursuits more becoming the dignity of human nature.

For those wretched unfortunates, over whom reflection must weep, and for whom morality must sigh, whose vices delicacy cannot conceal, nor liberality defend. The miserable fate of whom I would not myself aggravate by one wanton or harsh reflection. Yet they have been the fatal cause of furnishing our enemies with objections against us, which they conceived irrefragable, and aspersions unjust, as they are illiberal. They accuse us of encouraging the crime, and increasing the number of the guilty*.

* I have lately perused, with great satisfaction, an excellent sermon upon the heinous crime of seduction. It

Yet reflection and enquiry would soon convince them of their error.

Let them investigate the numbers of unfortunates in our country towns, and they will discover that, in an equal proportion, in places where the Methodists, the Evangelical, and the serious are predominant. Step out of our own Island, and look into Holland, where the drama is in a very humble state, and they will find even LICENSED abodes for the reception and accommodation of this much to be lamented class. Even centuries before the invention of the dramatic art, we find the wisest man of antiquity describing the subtle display of meretricious charms, and shewing the degenerate Jewish fair not a whit inferior in cunning to her frail sister, in the enlightened regions of christianity.

“ For at the window of my house I looked

was preached in behalf of an INSTITUTION, at once beneficial to the public, and highly honourable to the character of its supporters. But, I must confess, I was more than astonished to find our profession escape without an invective, particularly when I considered, that the reverend gentleman is too apt to wander out of his subject, for the express purpose of—(I was going to say)—abusing us. But, what was more gratifying, the appendix, containing a list of unfortunate sacrifices to the depravity and cruelty of man, does not furnish ONE instance of the deluded fair having been prepared for her degraded situation, by her attendance upon a theatre.

“ through the casement, and beheld among the
 “ simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a
 “ young man void of understanding, passing through
 “ the street near her corner, and he went the way to
 “ her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the
 “ black and dark night; and behold there met him
 “ a woman, with the attire of a harlot, and subtle
 “ of heart, (she is loud and stubborn, her feet
 “ abideth not in her house; now she is without,
 “ now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every
 “ corner) so she caught him, and kissed him, and
 “ with an impudent face said unto him, I have
 “ peace-offerings with me; this day have I paid
 “ my vows: therefore come I forth to meet thee,
 “ diligently to seek thy face; and I have found
 “ thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of
 “ tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of
 “ Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
 “ aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill
 “ of love until the morning; let us solace ourselves
 “ with loves; for the good man is not at home, he
 “ is gone a long journey; he hath taken a bag of
 “ money with him, and will not come home at the
 “ day appointed. With her much fair speech she
 “ caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips
 “ she forced him. Her house is the way to Hell,
 “ going down to the chambers of death.” Prov. vii.

I have endeavoured to establish, and I trust
 satisfactorily, that the stage, even with the impedi-

ments of beggary and contumely, does not tend to vitiate the principles of the professors; on the contrary, from the instances I have produced, it has a tendency to improve their morals, strengthen their fortitude, increase their stock of intellectual acquirements, and render them every way more worthy the support and approbation of the wise and good. The influence the stage will, or may have, upon a nation at large, I humbly conceive can be best known by taking a survey of the present state of it through Europe. The profession is received and adopted in England, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Holland, and Russia. In the two first, it is noted, fixed, encouraged, and admired;—in the third, it is degenerated into sing-song and spectacle;—in the fourth, it is tolerated;—in the fifth, it is warmly supported;—in the sixth, it is received with indifference;—in the seventh, it has a partial footing. In Sweden and Denmark, it languishes. In Turkey it is not to be found. The state of learning, refinement, taste, genius, and religion of each particular nation, is pretty generally known. Their virtues and their vices—their civilization or their barbarism. I shall not therefore trespass upon the time or patience of my reader, by tracing its progress through the different countries, or weary him with proofs of the influence it may have had in rendering them great, or debasing them in the scale. It is not for me to determine, whether the people of each district have formed the stage, or the stage

reformed the people. I can only say, that I turn with a lively gratification to the survey of Europe, and I find those the greatest, the wisest, and the most prosperous of nations where the drama exists in vigour—where it is encouraged, supported, and admired—where the selfish efforts of the prejudiced cannot destroy it—nor the malignant condemnation of fanaticism extirpate it!

I know it has been urged as an argument against the use of the stage, that even some of its most strenuous advocates are obliged to recommend the necessity of strong curbs, to check its improper progress. This is futile to the extreme, the more powerful the agent, the more imperious the necessity for curbs and checks. We must be aware, things salutary in their proper course, if carried beyond their just bounds, degenerate into the most noxious and offensive properties. Without a controuling power, liberty is disgraced by licentiousness—love by sensuality and voluptuousness—wit becomes ribaldry—charity profuseness—hospitality ostentation—religion absurdity—and philanthropy weakness.

Without a curb, there would always be found abandoned poets, who would readily place in a degrading point of view, talent, honour, and virtue.

We need not go to the Athenian stage for

proofs—our own country will furnish us with examples in abundance, to evince the abasement of genius, in prostituting its energies to spiteful invective and invidious satire. And, as we know there are men, who, for their own private advantages, and their own selfish emoluments, will, under the garb of religion, commit the most flagrant acts against simple morality. So are we convinced there are others, who, under the shelter of the drama, would give the most fatal stabs to order, decency, virtue, and every thing precious to the common weal. To guard against such intruders, CURBS become absolutely necessary.

The principal faults of our present stage I conceive to originate from three sources. First, from the illiberal opinions entertained against the professors. Secondly, from the inattention of the legislature to its stability and support. Thirdly, the cold and more than affected indifference of the learned bodies to its progress and welfare. Let the government encourage the establishment of country theatricals upon a respectable footing. Let it frame an act for incorporating its members. Let it watch over the stage that it does not promulgate principles detrimental to the grand interests of a well organized state. The patriot observe it closely, that it breathes nothing hostile to the principles of the constitution, or inimical to the genuine pure flame of liberty. Let religion condescend to mark that

it presumes not to infringe upon her hallowed rites. Let morality keep a fixed and jealous eye upon the vehicle, which can so materially aid or injure her dearest interests; let the whole combine to purify it from its errors, and make it, as it was ever intended, the engine of improvement, relaxation, and instruction. “To hold, as ’twere the mirror up
 “to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn
 “her own image, and the very age and body of
 “the time his form and pressure.”

Above all, be banished far the ill-founded prejudice against the professors. Let not actor and dissipation—player and debauchery—be considered as synonymous. Don’t enquire *what* he is? but how he *conducts* himself; and there would soon be discovered as many valuable members composing the theatrical fraternity as any other.

It would then be found histrionical pursuits do not vitiate the mind—nor the profession tend to the corruption of its principles.

From all I can collect upon the subject, by reading, discussion, observation, and experience, I feel myself authorised to affirm, that a well regulated stage would be ever serviceable to mankind, an able assistant to religion, a strong stimulus to morality, a rigid inculcator of virtue, a soother

and corrector of the vindictive passions, a moderator and promoter of the gentler ones, and a powerful agent in the hands of a wise legislator for forming a nation to every thing

GREAT AND GOOD.

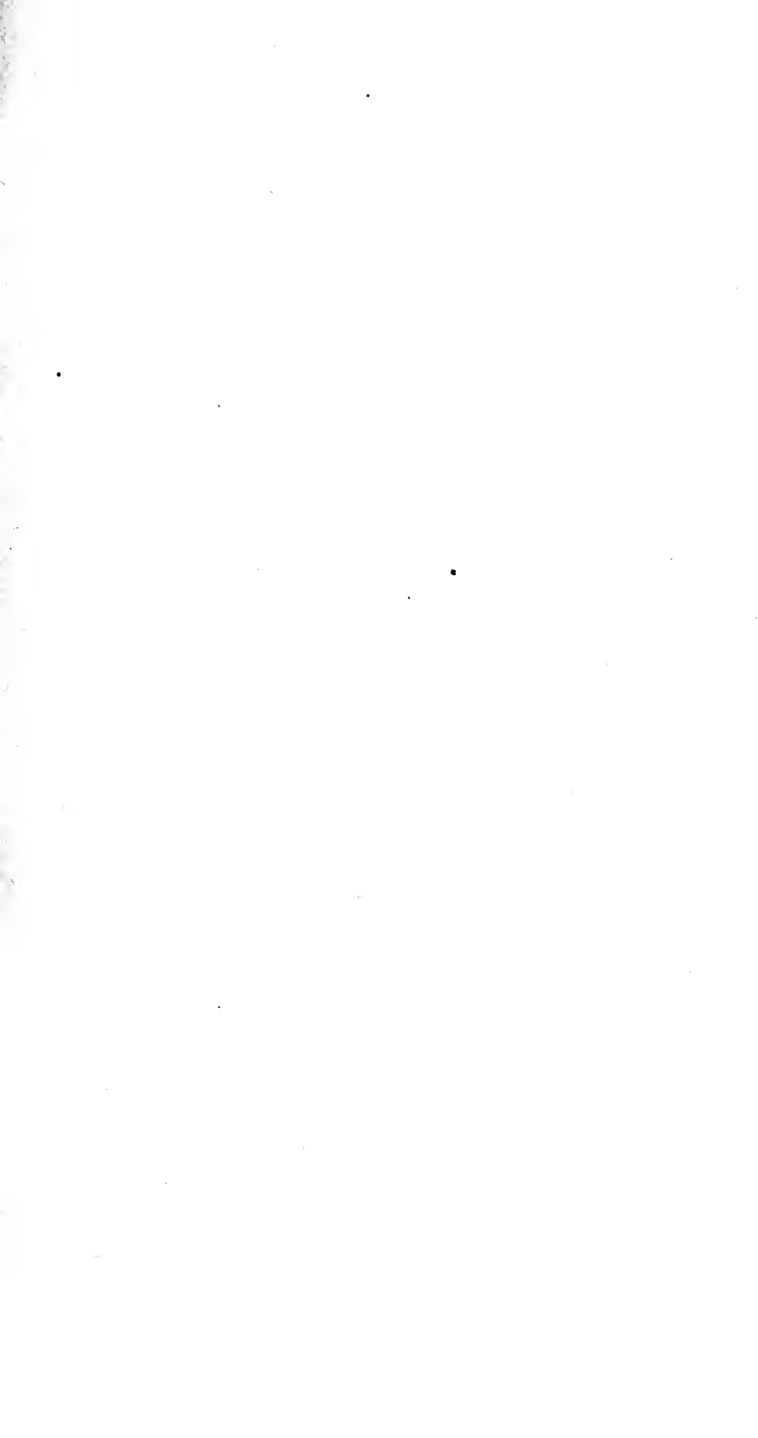
THE END.

William Ross, Printer, Bowlalley-lane, Hull.

ERRATA.

Page	13	line	11	read	"bellow forth"
	14		3		"down to the period"
	16		13		"schoolmen"
	29		4	remove the note of interrogation from	"evidence"
	36		4	remove the comma, read	"Scipio Africanus"
	45		8	read	"seem to be"
	46		7		"for every virtue"
	52		5		"and grievous sin"
	55		21		"they invidiously"
	56		1		"over to ransack"
	—		17		"pity and fear"
	63		20		"their vacillancy"
	75		8		"I conceived"
	79		10		"divine replies in the ensuing letter"
115	Note line	3			"monotonous mode"
121		3			"form a long"
129	Note line	6			"of defining it"
148		6			"with unparalleled"
154		21			"her thigh bone"
165		10			"cheerful"
197		15			"Utopians"
199		24			"and accusations unjust"
—		25			"They charge us with encouraging"
200		5			"That they exist in an equal"
202		15			"The two first it is rooted"
204		17			"inattention of the legislature"

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